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General Assembly
Fifty-third Session

Official Records

14th plenary meeting
Thursday, 24 September 1998, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Address by Mr. Armando Calderón Sol, President of the Republic of El Salvador

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Assembly will first hear an address by the President of the Republic of El Salvador.

Mr. Armando Calderón Sol, President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of El Salvador, His Excellency Mr. Armando Calderón Sol, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Calderón Sol (*interpretation from Spanish*): Allow me to begin by expressing our sorrow at the loss of human life and the material damage caused by the inclemencies of nature in our sister nations of the Caribbean. We feel the greatest solidarity with them and urge the international community quickly and generously to provide them with emergency assistance to deal with this crisis.

We would like to extend to you, Sir, our sincere congratulations on your election to preside over this session of the General Assembly. We are particularly delighted by your election, as we enjoy excellent relations of friendship and cooperation with your country.

We would also like to extend our thanks to your predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for his work in promoting the objectives of the United Nations, particularly in the area of encouraging reform of this Organization.

We extend our thanks to the Secretary-General for his excellent work in discharge of his mandate in an extremely complex international situation in which a great variety of interests are represented.

This will be my last participation here as President of the Republic of El Salvador, and I should therefore like to reiterate our appreciation to this Organization for having been a decisive factor in the signing and verification of the Peace Accords that ended the armed conflict in El Salvador.

From the beginning of our Administration, we declared our political will and our Government's commitment to comply fully with the Peace Accords, and we are pleased to say we have done so, despite the difficulties and obstacles encountered along the way.

We can say that profound transformations have taken place in El Salvador, resulting in the replacement of authoritarianism, abuse of power and impunity by a system founded on strict respect for the law and the principles and values of democracy.

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The restoration of peace and the consolidation of democracy have enabled the state of law in El Salvador to be strengthened, guaranteeing full independence for the basic organs of the Government of our Republic, as well as respect for the rights of the individual. We have also been able to proceed with a strategy of economic and social development with emphasis on the eradication of the underlying causes of poverty.

El Salvador now has a solid economy that is growing progressively and is internationally recognized and trusted. We are carrying out a successful plan for modernizing the country, seeking greater efficiency, productivity and competitiveness; one important component of this approach is the elimination of State monopolies through the privatization of such sectors as energy, telecommunications and social security.

We are implementing an economic policy of promoting our exports and attracting foreign investment, with a view to stimulating production, creating more jobs and making better use of the opening of international markets.

We have focused on programmes for promoting human resources and the progress of communities, especially in the neediest and most vulnerable sectors of society. To this end, we have allocated increasing percentages of our national budget to education, health and housing. As part of our strategy for fighting against poverty, the National Department for the Family is carrying out support programmes for women, children and the elderly.

Because we attach great importance to the ecology, we have established a Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources and we have now adopted a special law on this issue, in the aim of seeking solutions to the serious environmental problems facing our country and the world.

We are pleased to report that currently we are carrying out consultations across the country on the conclusion of a draft basic agreement for a national plan, involving the general agreement of all the various representative sectors of El Salvador's society. Our greatest hope is that the national plan will encourage participation by all Salvadoran men and women in a common long-term undertaking in which the interests of all are intertwined, without distinctions or political or ideological conditions, and which will be established as the nation's second great political agreement, after the Peace Accords.

El Salvador fully supports Central American integration, and along with the other Governments and private sectors in the region we are updating our legal instruments and strengthening the institutions that make up this system of regional integration.

From a multilateral perspective, we can say that we have participated in and supported the declarations and plans of action adopted at international summits and conferences, responsibly shouldering our commitments in the areas of environment, human rights, social issues, development of women, rights of the child, population and the fight against drug abuse, *inter alia*.

The profound changes that have taken place in recent years have had a strong impact on the international system, including the United Nations, resulting in agreement on the need for restructuring so as to respond properly to and solve global problems, particularly those of the developing countries.

We believe that Member States must join forces, act in solidarity with each other, shoulder their responsibilities and reach agreements to promote the changes that are needed in the United Nations so that it can fully discharge its mandate.

We support implementation of the Secretary-General's proposals to complete the restructuring of the Secretariat, and we advocate a change in attitude so that there can be real reform in the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies.

We need a Security Council that is more transparent, democratic and representative, so that it can enjoy the support of all Members of the Organization, and accordingly can become more effective in adopting practical and efficient measures to prevent and resolve conflicts.

We are pleased that progress has been made in the political situation worldwide, but we must express our concern over the fragile state of peace and stability in some parts of the world as a result of continuing conflict, failure to implement agreements, deadlocks and possible breakdowns in peace processes, acts of terrorism, hostility and lack of trust among States.

We are concerned about the deadlock in the peace process in the Middle East, and we urge the parties to seek a swift solution in accordance with the agreements made.

The Preamble to the Charter states that the peoples of the United Nations are resolved to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to unite their strength for the maintenance of international peace and security. Unfortunately, not all Member States are convinced of this or ready to put into practice these ideas so as to achieve the objectives that are of concern to us all.

The recent nuclear tests run counter to our efforts to achieve a world free from nuclear weapons. We have supported every initiative to ensure a safer world for our peoples, and, in a spirit of international solidarity, I am pleased to report that earlier this month El Salvador deposited its instrument of ratification on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

We believe that terrorism in any of its manifestations is an affront to the civilized principles of the human race and constitutes criminal conduct, which we strongly condemn and which cannot be justified on political, ideological, philosophical, ethnic or religious grounds. We accordingly condemn the terrorist attacks in Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa and Northern Ireland, which took innocent lives, wounded thousands and destroyed property.

That is why we support Security Council resolution 1189 (1998), which calls on all States and international institutions to cooperate with and provide support and assistance to investigations with a view to bringing to justice those who planned and carried out those reprehensible acts.

The Government of El Salvador recognizes and supports the efforts of the international community strongly to fight against drug abuse. We reaffirm our commitment made in the Declaration on the Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction and in the measures to enhance international cooperation, which we adopted during the special session of the General Assembly devoted to the drugs problem last June.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action will be important milestones providing an opportunity for us to think about the progress made and the effective enjoyment of fundamental freedoms. They also provide an opportunity for every State to renew its commitment to comply with the obligations it has entered into, as part of the international legal machinery that protects and promotes these rights.

El Salvador reaffirms its support for the restoration of the rights of the Republic of China on Taiwan as a State Member of this Organization because we believe it is a matter of justice to respect the sovereign will and aspirations of its people in accordance with the principle of universality enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

The changes that have occurred in the international arena since the end of the cold war have not narrowed the gap between the developed and developing countries — rather, the gap has become wider. The globalization, liberalization and interdependence that characterize the new international order are challenges and opportunities of which many of our countries cannot take proper advantage because of the constraints we face. Integrating into the competitive world requires resources, technology and financing that go well beyond the national capacities of the least developed countries. This situation can be overcome only with the participation of the countries that are better developed.

In his report on the work of the Organization, the Secretary-General said again that the volume of external assistance to the developing countries has declined steadily during the current decade, and much of what is given is not appropriate for or aimed at the needs of the recipient countries. El Salvador urges donor countries to try to increase their cooperation for development, and particularly urges the industrialized countries to facilitate access to their markets for products from less developed countries.

The great advances made in recent times in all areas of human knowledge highlight the need to make more of an effort to resolve the basic problems facing the majority of the world's population. If we truly wish to have a world free from poverty, war, drugs, crime, terrorism and environmental degradation, we must join forces so that together we can find new mechanisms and new paths of action that lead us to a swift solution to the problems and concerns of our peoples.

We appeal for the wisdom and help of the gods of the nations to ensure that in all corners of the earth peace, harmony, solidarity and progress will reign.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of El Salvador for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Armando Calderón Sol, President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Petru Lucinschi, President of the Republic of Moldova

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr. Petru Lucinschi, President of the Republic of Moldova, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Moldova, His Excellency Mr. Petru Lucinschi, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Lucinschi *(spoke in Moldovan; interpretation from French text furnished by the delegation)*: Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. I am convinced that under your guidance this session will be crowned with success. I should also like to express my sincere gratitude to your predecessor, the representative of Ukraine, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for the skill with which he led this body during his term of office.

I should like to take this opportunity to express our deepest appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his efforts to promote the reform of the Organization for the benefit of the entire international community.

I have the honour and the privilege of addressing the General Assembly for the first time. From this lofty rostrum I should like to underline the importance the Republic of Moldova attaches to the role of the United Nations in the world.

In the new world structure, the United Nations is, for the Republic of Moldova, as it is for other States, the body that allows them to express their national identity and their own points of view in a framework with the largest possible audience and resonance. This is why my country takes an active part in debates on issues of importance to the international community, pertaining to the maintenance of peace and international security, to social and economic development, to the expansion of international and regional cooperation, to fighting terrorism and to increasing the role and effectiveness of the United Nations.

The far-reaching changes in international life at the end of this century have left their imprint on the activities of the United Nations. That is why we must strengthen and further improve the United Nations system so as to renew and adapt the Organization to the increased demands of international cooperation. Today, more than a year after the new initiatives were launched by the Secretary-General, we observe that his proposals, recommendations and specific measures for reforming the United Nations correspond to a large extent to these demands.

My delegation welcomes the progress achieved in the reform process of the United Nations, particularly in the economic and social spheres, and supports the measures to streamline and make more efficient the activities of the Organization. We believe that the merging of some structures, as well as decentralization and the transfer of authority to field offices will make an essential contribution to adapting the United Nations to new requirements. We believe that the debates during this session on proposals and measures for the restructuring of the entire United Nations system will have an impact on other areas of the Organization's activities.

The increase in the number of Security Council members is the crux of the overall reform of the United Nations. Since, thus far, we have not found generally acceptable solutions pertaining to the various aspects of the issue of reforming the Security Council, we believe that during this session Member States should show the same spirit of compromise as that shown by the Working Group on the Security Council question.

While taking into account the need to ensure better representation of Member States in the Security Council, the Republic of Moldova, as at previous sessions, continues to be in favour of a moderate expansion in the number of Council members. New permanent seats should be granted to developed countries such as Germany and Japan, as the Republic of Moldova has advocated at several previous sessions of the General Assembly, and possibly to developing countries as well.

Regarding the number of non-permanent seats, the Republic of Moldova is in favour of a reasonable increase in accordance with the principle of equitable geographical representation so as to reflect the interests of all regional groups. To our mind, an increase in the number of the

members of the Security Council in that category should take into account the legitimate interest of States of Central and Eastern Europe in having an additional, non-permanent seat since in recent years the number of States in that region has doubled.

Changes that have taken place in recent years in States with transitional economies, including the Republic of Moldova, have shown that political and economic changes involve risks and difficulties that affect several areas of society. Major problems, such as a decline in production, are too complex to be solved only with one's own resources.

In such circumstances, the role of the United Nations system in the economic and social spheres takes on a new dimension. The United Nations must remain the framework for international cooperation for all nations. This, in fact, is an absolute necessity in the current situation, in which financial crises have affected the economies of several countries, thereby jeopardizing their political and economic reforms.

Committed to the path of democracy, the Republic of Moldova is steadily striving to create basic institutions for the rule of law and the legislative framework necessary for transition to a market economy. As a result, we have been able to stabilize the macroeconomic situation and have reduced the annual inflation rate to 12 per cent.

My country takes an active part in international cooperation within the framework of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the South-East European Cooperative Initiative, the Central European Initiative and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. Similarly, the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union has considerably diversified economic relations for the Republic of Moldova. My country also attaches crucial importance to its forthcoming adherence to the World Trade Organization.

Like other Member States, including those with economies in transition, the Republic of Moldova has taken part in United Nations projects in the economic and social sphere and is benefiting from the assistance and support of the United Nations to promote economic reform. This is why we greatly appreciate the activities of the United Nations Development Programme.

The economic decline in Asia has engendered a world economic crisis with devastating consequences. As the Secretary-General has said, the world economic crisis has been felt in Russia, in North America and in Europe. Today, major economies are increasingly feeling the impact of events taking place in less developed areas of the world.

In the process of the globalization of the world economy, the United Nations could serve as a coordinating centre for creating an international financial structure.

Managing the crisis and the effects of globalization also has particular importance for countries with economies in transition. Those States find themselves at the stage of moving towards a market economy, which requires the achievement of a whole set of objectives, such as macroeconomic stabilization, reform of price-setting mechanisms, restructuring of the major sectors of the economy, reduction of inflation, creation of new jobs and, last but not least, integration into the world economy.

Finally, it is important in our view that, in seeking solutions to the problems facing States with economies in transition, we should take into account first and foremost the specific characteristics of each country. We must take into consideration the fact that economic recovery in this category of countries is a complex problem because of the particularities of each State.

We hope that the United Nations will enhance its presence in States with economies in transition through regional economic commissions, as well as through funds and specialized agencies. We also deem it useful in this regard to consider the question of the integration of the economies of countries in transition into the world economy.

In the context of the debate on reform in the economic sphere, I wish to note that my country supports decisions adopted by the General Assembly and by the Economic and Social Council regarding an increase in development assistance and effective coordination of activities of the regional commissions with other bodies of the United Nations system.

The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is yet another reason to intensify efforts to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the world. The Republic of Moldova greatly appreciates United Nations human rights activities and supports the reform

measures that have been adopted, in particular those pertaining to strengthening the role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

My country attaches special importance to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Republic of Moldova has acceded to the major international legal instruments on human rights adopted within the framework of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Our Parliament has ratified a series of international conventions such as the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights. The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova has adopted more than 20 laws dealing expressly with human rights. Respect for and protection of human rights in my country are also safeguarded by the Constitutional Court, which has the final say on the Constitution, by the principle of the separation of powers, and by the responsibility of the State towards its citizens.

The major events of the past decade have had a considerable impact on the situation in various parts of the world. Sometimes these events have been complicated by social tension and by serious violations of human rights, and have even given rise to armed conflicts.

It is known that the conflict in the eastern part of the Republic of Moldova in the summer of 1992 was caused by the dismantling of the USSR and that it was supported by forces wishing to preserve the old political system. Unfortunately, we were unable to avoid that tragic situation. Even though the conflict has ceased, its consequences remain. There has been no final settlement of the conflict, and to some extent this is an obstacle to the process of the democratization of society and to the promotion of democratic reforms. Serious human rights violations continue in the eastern part of the Republic of Moldova. Members of the Ilascu group have not yet been released; in the meantime, Prisoner Ilascu has actually been elected as a Deputy in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. The efforts of the Republic of Moldova to settle this conflict peacefully, and my country's readiness to grant that region special status with broad authority, on the condition that it respects the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova, are well known.

But I have to recall that we are still facing difficulties in the negotiating process that took place with the cooperation of the OSCE and representatives of the Russian Federation and of Ukraine as mediators. The irreconcilable position of the separatist leaders has blocked the full implementation of agreements signed with the help of the mediators, which were intended to be interim documents that could help renew negotiations and increase trust among the parties. The situation is further aggravated by the presence in the region of vast quantities of weapons and ammunition and vast numbers of foreign troops.

However, on 21 October 1994 the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation signed an agreement on the withdrawal of armaments and military personnel. Unfortunately the Russians have yet to ratify that agreement. Implementation of the agreement would be in line with the letter and the spirit of the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, which stipulates the neutrality of our State and bans the deployment of foreign troops on our territory.

We believe that the immediate withdrawal of these vast quantities of weapons and ammunition would considerably strengthen stability in the region while facilitating the process of settling the crisis. In that context, we hope that the OSCE mission in the Republic of Moldova and the mediator States, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, will intensify their efforts to bring about the resumption of negotiations in conformity with the principle of respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova, and that they will contribute to the withdrawal of the weapons, ammunition and troops. This would defuse the conflict and would create conditions propitious for its final settlement. Finally, I state solemnly that the Republic of Moldova remains open to dialogue and will continue to try to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. We hope that common sense will prevail.

The problems facing humankind as we come to the end of this century are many and complex. Although the threat of another world war has been diminished, humanity must face a multitude of conflicts and tensions that jeopardize peace and stability in many parts of the world.

I believe that we must make use of all our experience, and focus all our efforts to resolve current crises and to prevent conflicts. In my view, we can face today's challenges and ensure world peace and security only through joint action by the international community. At this stage of ongoing globalization, the United Nations, with its universal mission, remains the principal forum in which to find solutions to crucial issues. My country is ready to cooperate with all other Member

States to strengthen the Organization's capacity better to meet the challenges of the coming millennium.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Moldova for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Petru Lucinschi, President of the Republic of Moldova, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Abdulsalami Abubakar, Head of State, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency Mr. Abdulsalami Abubakar.

Mr. Abdulsalami Abubakar, Head of State, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Abdulsalami Abubakar, Head of State, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Abubakar: I bring greetings, Sir, from the Government and the people of Nigeria, on whose behalf I am honoured and privileged to address this fifty-third session of the General Assembly, which is taking place under your presidency. Your election to the presidency is an expression of the confidence which Member States repose in you and a measure of our faith in your capacity to bring to bear on the work of the Assembly your wisdom, competence and diplomatic skills. I congratulate you most warmly on your election and also wish you a very successful tenure.

My delegation would also like to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine, for the excellent manner in which he conducted the affairs of the fifty-second session.

We also take this opportunity to express our immense satisfaction with the way Secretary-General Kofi Annan has steered the affairs of our Organization. We wish to assure him of our fullest support and cooperation as he leads our Organization into the twenty-first century.

The United Nations represents the will of all mankind to collectively seek solutions to the common problems facing our world. It demonstrates the ingenuity of the human spirit to assemble the diverse peoples of the world in a collaborative effort to attain the goals of international peace and security, promotion of socio-economic development, respect for human rights, good governance and rule of law. Our active participation in the affairs of this Organization since independence in 1960 is indicative of our belief in its continued relevance as a unique institution where all nations — big and small, rich and poor, developed and developing — meet on the basis of equality and mutual respect to harmonize their interests and policies for the common good.

It is for this reason that we have continued to demonstrate our commitment to work in collaboration with Member States for the strengthening and revitalization of the United Nations and its agencies. We therefore believe strongly that the issue of reform and democratization of the United Nations must be brought to the front burner. Reform is a continuing process and is consistent with the rapid changes taking place in our world. Our Organization will become irrelevant if it fails to adapt its structures and management style to present-day realities. In this regard, my delegation wishes to commend Mr. Kofi Annan, our Secretary-General, for his dedication and steadfast commitment to the cause of reform, and the generally positive attitude of Member States to the critical issues of reform and democratization of the United Nations.

However, we must admit that substantive progress has been very slow because of the narrow positions which some delegations and regional groupings have continued to take on the fundamental issues of reform and democratization of the United Nations. We therefore urge all Member States to demonstrate urgent political will in this task of renewing the Organization for the next millennium by working out mutually acceptable compromises that will move the reform process forward. In doing this, we shall be able to build an Organization with the capacity and the potential to make our world safer and more prosperous.

With regard to the particular issue of the reform and democratization of the Security Council — a subject to which my country, being one of the original sponsors of the relevant resolution, attaches great importance — I am disheartened to note that no tangible substantive progress has been made five years after the creation of the Open-ended Working Group on the subject. We note here again that mistrust and suspicion among States thwarted any visible movement towards a successful outcome. Yet the status quo is not in the best interest of the general membership of the United Nations. Surely, the Council needs to be restructured, its membership expanded in both the permanent and non-permanent categories and its working methods, decision-making methods and decision-making processes improved. This is the path towards the democratization of the Council, which will thereby enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of its decisions on critical issues of global peace and security.

My delegation is also of the strong view that the reform of the Security Council must also touch on the proper relationship between the Council and the General Assembly. The Charter of the United Nations assigns to the Security Council primary, but not exclusive, responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security; hence, there is also a role here for the General Assembly. Unfortunately, however, the voice of the General Assembly, which is the most democratic organ of the United Nations, is often drowned out by that of the Security Council on issues of global peace and security.

On the specific issues of the composition and size of the Council, my delegation continues to assert that the current anomaly of African non-representation in the permanent membership category must be corrected as a matter of urgency, as our continent, with its 53 Member States, collectively constitutes almost one third of the entire membership of the United Nations. In this context, the decision of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to seek two permanent seats for Africa in a reformed and expanded Council can simply not be ignored. The demand is legitimate, credible and made with a full sense of responsibility and relevance in the international system. It deserves the full support of all Member States.

It is our deep conviction that a world without the United Nations would be inconceivable, especially in the wake of renewed conflicts in several parts of the globe. In this regard, it is a matter of concern that Africa accounts for a disproportionate share of global conflicts, with their implications for human suffering and deprivation. The scale of human tragedies arising from conflicts within and among African States is alarming. We are pleased to note that the Security Council is currently giving special consideration to the causes of conflict in our continent, with a view to identifying how the international community could work in partnership with us to resolve them. This initiative to focus attention on the need for a renewed and concerted international effort to promote peace and stability in our continent is clearly unprecedented and deserves our commendation.

Nigeria's role in the furtherance of the objectives of the United Nations, especially in the field of peacekeeping and peace-building, is well known. We have made great efforts in the promotion of peaceful resolution of conflicts in parts of Africa where innocent lives and property have been dangerously at risk. Nigeria has joined hands with like-minded States to restore law and order. This was the case in Liberia and, most recently, in Sierra Leone, where President Tejan Kabbah was restored to his position as the democratically elected President in March this year.

This was the first time in the recent history of Africa that a democratically elected regime overthrown by a military coup was restored as a result of a collective action in a subregion. As the current Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Nigeria is proud to have provided the leadership within the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) for the collective subregional efforts which resulted in that epoch-making event.

I should like to take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to the international community for its overwhelming support during the crisis, which helped, in no small measure, to demoralize the rebel forces and speed up the restoration of democracy and the rule of law in Sierra Leone. The war in Sierra Leone is over; the same can be said of Liberia, but the threat remains. We therefore urge the international community and international humanitarian organizations to take an active interest in rehabilitation efforts in the two countries. A lot remains to be done there.

Currently our subregional grouping, through its Committee of Seven, is actively involved in restoring peace in Guinea-Bissau, where a rebel group took up arms against the elected Government. It joined efforts with like-minded groups and a result a ceasefire was agreed upon a few weeks ago. We are optimistic that this agreement will hold.

We have also helped to create within the Organization of African Unity a continent-wide Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. This facility enjoys wide support. However, it has been unable to live up to the lofty ideals for which it was set up, owing largely to inadequate resources in terms of military hardware and funding. We invite the international community and other interested bodies to support the cause of peace and security in Africa through the OAU regional and subregional instruments for conflict prevention, management and resolution.

Nigeria is disturbed by the escalation of terrorist activities in many parts of the world. The recent tragic bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, where some 260 innocent lives were lost, have brought home graphically to us all the fact that no country or society is immune from the activities of terrorists. We condemn these bombings. Terrorism is one of the most heinous crimes against humanity. It constitutes a serious threat to international peace and security. We must enhance international cooperation to combat and eliminate it in all its manifestations. We must reflect our common concern for this problem through support for an international convention on terrorism.

My Administration came to the helm in Nigeria last June and began its short tenure with a few clear-cut objectives and policy thrusts. The most important is the design and implementation of a transparent, free and all-inclusive programme of transition to civil rule within the shortest time-frame. This decision was welcomed by the political class.

Our goal is to return our country to a democratically elected civilian government on 29 May 1999. To this end, we inaugurated the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on 11 August 1998, with full powers to organize and manage the various stages of the electoral process without pressure or interference from any external body or authority. There are no restrictions to the formation of political parties, and several political parties are already seeking registration. The party registration guidelines just issued by INEC emphasize the role of the electorate as the ultimate determinant of the existence and success of political parties. This is democracy par excellence and confirms the confidence of Nigerians in INEC.

Furthermore, the Independent National Electoral Commission has published the timetable for the various elections in the Transition Programme, beginning with the local government elections in December 1998 and culminating in the presidential elections scheduled for 27 February 1999. We are committed to sustaining the independence, integrity and transparency of INEC. Every stage of the elections may be freely observed by international monitors from the United Nations, the Commonwealth and other interested bodies. These measures will ensure the credibility and integrity of the whole electoral process. In this regard, we note with satisfaction that both the United Nations and the Commonwealth have already dispatched assessment teams to Nigeria to meet with INEC officials with a view to reaching agreement on the modalities and the substance of cooperation between the Commission and the two organizations.

The draft constitution presented by the National Constitutional Conference in 1995 has now been published and will be ready for wide circulation in due course. All comments and views arising from the public will be duly presented for consideration prior to promulgation.

I am aware that on the question of human rights observance, Nigeria has recently been the subject of international attention. It is the objective of my administration, with the support and understanding of the international community, to move Nigeria in the direction of fullest respect for fundamental human rights, good governance, accountability and rule of law. This commitment to human rights has been amply demonstrated by the release of political detainees, the granting of pardons to some convicted persons and the withdrawal of charges against others. The general level of individual freedom, in particular freedom of expression and association, has greatly improved. The cases of people who are being detained and have not been arraigned before the courts and of a certain class of persons already convicted for offences are being examined, and appropriate decisions will be taken. Already, the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice of the Federation, in conjunction with the Minister of Internal Affairs and the National Commission on Human Rights of Nigeria, have zoned the country for the purpose of accelerating the decongestion of prisons.

We wish to reiterate our call on those Nigerians who are currently in self-imposed exile to return and participate in the political and economic development of our country. With our quest to improve our socio-economic infrastructure and climate for governance, we will conduct a census of Nigerian professionals and those

with special talents currently excelling worldwide with a view to harnessing all of the country's human resources.

I have also visited all our military formations to reconfirm the commitment of the armed forces and police to the democratization programme. The officers and men of the Nigerian armed forces and police, like the majority of our people, yearn for democracy in a united and peaceful country. They are overwhelmingly in support of our democratization programme.

I stand before this body as the leader of a country which is now fully engaged in a genuine and irreversible process of transition to democracy. Therefore, having honoured our commitment to the restoration of the fundamental human rights and freedoms of our people and advanced the prospects of democratization in Nigeria, we now call on the Western countries to lift the sanctions which some of them have imposed on our country. Today, perhaps more than ever before, we require the support and understanding of all the friends of Nigeria and the international community as a whole to help us in the implementation of our programmes and policies aimed at uplifting the living standards of our people.

In conclusion, a silent but peaceful revolution is taking place in Nigeria. Our people are determined to ensure that sustainable democratic governance is established in the country. Nigeria is clearly at the threshold of a new beginning in its domestic political and socio-economic structure and its foreign relations agenda. This is the time, therefore, for the international community to give the necessary encouragement and support for our endeavours.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Head of State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Abdulsalami Abubakar, Head of State, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

Address by His Serene Highness Crown Prince Albert, Crown Prince of the Principality of Monaco

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Crown Prince of the Principality of Monaco.

His Serene Highness Crown Prince Albert, Crown Prince of the Principality of Monaco was escorted to the rostrum.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Crown Prince of the Principality of Monaco, His Serene Highness Crown Prince Albert, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Crown Prince Albert (Monaco) *(interpretation from French)*: The principality of Monaco is particularly pleased that you, Mr. President, are carrying out the high functions and responsibilities of this fifty-third session of our General Assembly. Your election by acclamation bears witness to the confidence that the international community has placed in your personal qualities and in your experience. It is also a manifestation of the respect that Member States have for your country, Uruguay.

I would also like to include the newly elected members of the Bureau in my cordial congratulations to you and in the wishes for success that I extend to you.

It is also a pleasant duty for me to pay a most earnest and sincere tribute to Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, who presided with such great talent and effectiveness over the fifty-second of the Assembly.

Geography often dictates the fate of a nation. This is particularly true for the Principality of Monaco, whose life and development for centuries have depended on the sea. So it is that my country has always attached great importance to all issues concerning the sea. In fact, we host several institutions devoted to the marine environment.

In this International Year of the Ocean, it seems fitting to recall that the Principality is also celebrating the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birth of Prince Albert I of Monaco, one of the founders of

oceanography, to whom our country owes a great deal of its renown.

My illustrious forebear, born in 1848, devoted a substantial part of his life to the scientific study of the oceans. An accomplished and passionate seaman, he was a pioneer during 30 years of scientific study that led him from the Azores to Spitzberg.

Prince Albert I created in Monaco in 1910 the Oceanographic Museum in order to share what he had learned from his maritime expeditions and to reveal the beauty and wealth of the marine environment. Previously, in Paris in 1906, he had founded the Oceanographic Institute, which, in the same spirit, he devoted to teaching and research.

He was also a forerunner of oceanology, in that some of his work or his insights led to major medical discoveries, such as anaphylaxis and antibacterial action. By advancing research on what he called the meteorology of the upper atmosphere of the oceans, he paved the way for studies of oceanic atmospheric exchanges and their impact on climate.

Following his example, we should encourage climatological studies in order to prevent as much as possible such tragic flooding as that which — victimizing too many people — rages today in Bangladesh, in China and in the Chiapas region in Mexico. This is not to overlook, of course, hurricane Georges, which is now striking the Caribbean islands with such force.

In responding to the wishes of the Ninth International Oceanographic Congress, on 30 March 1910 Prince Albert I brought together a special commission to propose a programme for the scientific exploration of the Mediterranean. Because of the First World War, the general constitutive conference could not be held until 1919, in Madrid. In the presence of representatives of eight States with coasts on the Mediterranean, the programme and working methods of the international commission for the scientific exploration of the Mediterranean were established. The comprehensive activities of this institution, unique in nature and mission, continue today. The institution brings together very high-level political leaders and scientists. Last June in Croatia it held its thirty-fifth meeting. Prince Rainier III, my father, who is now the Chairman, took that opportunity to again express his confidence in the scientific community, encouraging it not to underestimate the influence it might have on political decisions, especially in the area of maritime affairs.

It is in this spirit that we attach special interest to the work conducted by the Independent World Commission on Oceans, under the leadership of the former President of Portugal, Mario Soares. We hope that its conclusions, which are essential for the lasting conservation of our marine heritage, will receive all the attention they deserve.

Inspired by the scientific work of Prince Albert I, Prince Rainier III, my father, and his Government have in recent years continued and strengthened his visionary policy. Two examples are the scientific centre established in 1960 and the RAMOGE agreement signed with France and Italy so as to prevent all types of pollution — which are numerous in the Ligurian Sea.

Furthermore, since last 27 March the Principality has had a law that brings together in one legislative body all provisions relating to the law of the sea, conforming them to the legal and technical requirements of the contemporary maritime world — first and foremost to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other relevant international instruments to which Monaco is a party.

We are also very much involved in activities carried out by the International Whaling Commission. Our efforts recently led to the establishment of 40 degrees south as the boundary of the new southern sanctuary designed to ensure protection for the feeding and reproduction grounds of 90 per cent of large whales. The Governments affected by this decision have committed themselves to limit the number of so-called scientific hunting permits in order to protect effectively this sanctuary.

Mr. Filippi Balestra (San Marino), Vice-President, took the Chair.

I would like, furthermore, to draw the attention of the General Assembly to fresh threats to the marine environment posed by new synthetic chemical products, such as dioxins and certain pesticides which affect the neurological and brain development of many species. Large amounts of these products are now found in the flesh of fish and other marine vertebrates in the northern hemisphere, presenting an imminent threat not only to the balance of marine biodiversity but also to the health of the human race. I am thinking in particular of the Beluga whales, now among the most poisoned animals on our planet.

The substantial contribution of Prince Albert I to progress in oceanography should not allow us to forget his research in other areas, such as the study of prehistory. Thanks to discoveries made in coastal caves, it has enabled us to identify one of the links in human evolution, which has helped to establish scientifically the common origin of the human race. These fossils, along with other archaeological objects found in the caves of the region, are preserved in the Museum of Prehistoric Anthropology, which the Prince created in 1902 in Monaco. Just as he had established the Oceanographic Institute in Paris to promote marine sciences, Prince Albert I gave the French capital an Institute of Human Paleontology, where since 1910 courses have been given and interdisciplinary research has been conducted on geology, prehistoric paleontology and ethnography.

Like many scholars, Prince Albert I did not limit his activities to research. He felt the profound need for communication, teaching and propagation of knowledge. He gave talks in Italy, Belgium, Spain and Austria. He inaugurated congresses in Paris, Bordeaux and Washington. One could also see him in the outskirts of the French capital giving night classes to workers enrolled in the People's University of Paris. Prince Albert I probably anticipated the immense enthusiasm with which at the beginning of the 1960s men and women of all disciplines and a large part of the peoples of the world were to come together in favour of ecology — that is, respect for nature, its balance and the interdependence of the beings that live in it. Since the beginning of the century he had perceived some of the bases for an environmentalism which was both popular and scientific and which he himself tried to put into practice.

So it is that his temple of the sea, the Oceanographic Institute Museum of Monaco, was, on his initiative, surrounded by superb gardens containing original and varied Mediterranean species. Also very interested in botany, he established on the rocky, arid coast of Monaco an exotic garden open to the public where we find succulent plants, some very rare and endangered, preserved with great care. My ancestor was to some extent a forerunner of those involved in the defence of biodiversity.

A profound believer in justice and an ardent defender of universal friendship, Prince Albert I in 1903 also created in Monaco the International Institute for Peace, where he brought together jurists, economists, philosophers and scientists to whom he assigned the mission of considering "ways of solving disputes between nations, propagating dedication to methods for bringing about harmonious understanding, and eradicating hatred from the hearts of peoples". Forty-two years later these words echoed in the preamble to the United Nations Charter adopted in San Francisco.

The Academy for Peace and International Security, which meets regularly in Monaco, perpetuates, on the initiative of my father, the reigning Prince, the determination of Prince Albert I to promote research on peace and the causes of conflict as well as the study of war. Its thirtieth session, which I was pleased to open on 19 March, devoted its work to globalization and international security. The discussions were led by high-ranking personalities from the worlds of diplomacy, defence and business, as well as by representatives of major international organizations. Its recommendations and conclusions essentially deal with the risks of tension and conflict inherent in the globalization of the economy and the best ways to overcome these risks.

The interest in humankind expressed in his research on primitive man and his environment, his commitment to scientific knowledge and its spread, his rejection of violence and his tireless fight for peace and respect for nature are all very contemporary messages which Prince Albert I bequeathed to us. This was the meeting of a human life with history, and his multidimensional legacy has come to us through time. He has influenced the minds of the people of Monaco, generation upon generation, in making us a welcoming, peace-loving people, respectful of our environment. Enriched by and adapted to world developments and progress by his successors, primarily my father, this heritage is now at the core of essential missions which we have entrusted to the United Nations. My country, within its modest means, is more prepared than ever to make its experience, inherited from its difficult past, available for understanding and rapprochement.

The defence of human rights and respect for human dignity, which are inscribed in letters of gold in the United Nations Charter, were no doubt of inspiration to Prince Albert I when he personally committed himself to the rehabilitation of Captain Dreyfus and when he decided to grant constitutional political rights to his subjects in 1911.

These fundamental human rights are being commemorated by the international community today. This is a great event. Fifty years ago, on 10 December 1948, our General Assembly at its third session, held in Paris at the Palais de Chaillot, adopted the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights. One of those primarily responsible for it, the French professor René Cassin, received in 1968, 20 years after the solemn proclamation, the Nobel Peace Prize. This commemoration should be an opportunity for collective soul-searching. To what extent are human rights enjoyed internationally? Above all, what is the position with regard to the initiatives taken to realize the right to development, which was officially recognized in 1993 by the international community at the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna?

The current fierce economic competition which is aggravating macroeconomic imbalances is not without an impact on the enjoyment of human rights. While respect for civil and political rights seems to be less affected, economic, social and cultural rights underpinning the right to development have made only modest progress — where they have not, indeed, met with major setbacks.

The current financial crisis is depriving millions of men and women of their basic rights, when not actually destroying their lives. At the world level, it has led to an overall drop in life expectancy, an increase in infant and maternal mortality, greater unemployment, growing insecurity, uncontrolled migration and a grave deterioration in social welfare, accompanied by a relentless drop in income among the active population. The high-level dialogue on the theme of the social and economic impact of globalization and interdependence and their policy implications, which was held in this Hall on 17 and 18 September, clearly stressed these facts.

Human rights are indissoluble. They must be enjoyed by everyone everywhere. As the General Assembly proclaimed on 10 December 1948, they are a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. The highest authorities of my country, along with the entire Monegasque people, are thoroughly convinced of this.

One thought comes to mind. It may be a lengthy one, since the question is delicate and quite complex. The Government of the Principality is perfectly well aware that urgent and concrete steps must be encouraged at the national and global levels. Mrs. Mary Robinson, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, has our full support and all our confidence. We know how difficult her task is and how pitiful are her resources in the face of reality.

The Principality of Monaco also attaches the highest importance to the tireless and courageous work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which, I am pleased to recall, received the Nobel Peace Prize nearly 45 years ago in 1954. Mrs. Sadako Ogata and her colleagues deserve our support and respect.

The United Nations humanitarian activities, which are necessary today as never before, and its efforts to eliminate anti-personnel landmines and the human tragedy they entail also deserve our greatest encouragement.

I wish here to emphasize the special interest which my father, the Sovereign Prince, and I, President of the Red Cross of Monaco — currently celebrating its fiftieth anniversary — attach to respect for and strict implementation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949. Despite the tireless efforts of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, as well as of many humanitarian organizations that I wish to commend here for the altruism and courage of their members, we note an increase in serious violations of this text, as well as of the most basic human rights of the most vulnerable sectors of the population, including children.

Last June, the Security Council rightly expressed its grave concern at the terrible consequences to children of armed conflict. It energetically and unequivocally condemned the abuses to which they are subject, especially the humiliations, outrages, sexual violence, kidnapping and displacements, as well their recruitment and use in combat, in violation of current international law. The authorities of Monaco unreservedly share that position and are prepared to lend active support, to the extent of their abilities, to the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict so that he may fulfil his noble mission.

Unfortunately, the fate of children may be equally tragic outside armed conflict. Following the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in August 1996, the Government of Monaco, as I stated to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session, has striven to reform its criminal legislation in order to bring it into line with its commitments. In implementation of article 34 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Monaco is Party, new legislative provisions have been enacted, with broader scope to criminalize to the greatest possible extent the sexual exploitation of children to satisfy the vices of others.

The establishment, last July in Rome, of an International Criminal Court is a source of great hope. This represents major progress, a far-reaching change in the international order that fosters respect for the essential principles of humanitarian law. Its Statute, adopted by a large majority, opens the way to the prosecution of war crimes and the most heinous crimes against humanity, many of which affect children, of course, but also woman and the defenceless elderly. The Principality of Monaco, which participated in the Diplomatic Conference in Rome, welcomes this historic decision.

The Royal Government is grateful that such weighty issues as the definition of crimes, the principle of complementarity, jurisdictions, the independence of the prosecutor's office and relations with United Nations organs were all solved satisfactorily.

I also wish to express on behalf of my country our great satisfaction at the work which the Secretary-General has done in recent months. The reports he submits to us note progress in many areas, including administrative and financial management and the restructuring of the Secretariat. Outstanding progress has been achieved thanks to the trusting and close cooperation he has established with representatives of Member States and with officials of the most influential international world and regional bodies.

His diplomatic initiatives, carried out with great wisdom, patience and determination, have often been crowned with success, despite the obstacles and difficulties he has encountered. We are especially pleased that, in come cases, his initiatives have allowed us to prevent or stabilize conflicts that might otherwise have been extremely devastating.

The Secretary-General's well-written and incisive report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa has riveted our attention. It is a valuable source of inspiration and ideas for bringing peace to Africa.

In this respect, I cannot fail to recall that we are commemorating this year the fiftieth anniversary of peacekeeping operations. It was in 1948 that the first United Nations observer mission was established. I take this opportunity to pay a tribute to all those men and women who have served under the United Nations flag and to salute the memory of those who gave their lives in the line of duty. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld was among them. More recently, in Kabul, an Italian Lieutenant Colonel was killed and a French military adviser wounded. The Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session, is more relevant than ever. Ten years ago, on 10 December 1988, United Nations Peacekeeping Forces received the Nobel Peace Prize. As I see it, this high distinction should be recalled on the occasion of this anniversary.

I would like to express great sadness felt in my country over the accident of Swissair flight 111. My saddest thoughts go to the victims of that accident, some of whom belonged to the great United Nations family. We share the grief of their loved ones.

Africa and Europe have recently experienced a tragic series of terrorist attacks that have taken a toll of hundreds of victims including women, children, elderly people, many of whom were present merely by chance. Those attacks have given rise to an inevitable escalation of the use of force and an increased risk of conflict. The authorities and people of Monaco have felt these painful events very deeply. Through me, they wish to reaffirm to the Governments concerned and to the families of the victims their solidarity and their deepest sympathy.

On 13 August 1995, the Security Council firmly condemned acts of terrorism, which they called an outrage. It recalled its statement of 31 January 1992, issued at its high-level meeting of heads of State and Government. The Principality of Monaco agrees fully with that position. It is perfectly aware that terrorism endangers not only the security of States and their citizens, but also international cooperation and peace. My country is more convinced than ever of the need to strengthen international cooperation, with a view to combating more effectively this scourge, which is a serious and tragic setback in relations among human beings, nations and peoples. It fully endorses the provisions of General Assembly resolution 52/165, adopted on 15 December 1997, and its provisions aimed at the elimination of international terrorism.

Our Government is now considering the possibility of adhering to the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, which was adopted last year without a vote and which is currently open for signature. Furthermore, we hope that negotiations under way on a draft convention on the suppression of acts of nuclear terrorism will be concluded quickly.

In conclusion, it is my hope that the work of this fifty-third session of the General Assembly will be crowned with success and that the activities of the Organization will be strengthened in such vital areas as international security, disarmament, sustainable development and the protection of the environment.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Crown Prince of the Principality of Monaco for the statement he has just made.

His Serene Highness Crown Prince Albert, Crown Prince of the Principality of Monaco, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guinea, His Excellency Mr. Lamime Kamara.

Mr. Kamara (Guinea) *(interpretation from French)*: On behalf of my delegation, I should first of all like to congratulate Mr. Opertti warmly on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. My country, the Republic of Guinea, is pleased with this expression of confidence, eloquent proof of the international community's recognition of the very positive role played by his country, Uruguay, in working for the noble ideals of our Organization. I am sure his personal qualities and great experience will ensure success at this session.

I should also like to take this opportunity to convey our great appreciation to Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, for the skill, open-mindedness and efficiency of his presidency.

I should also like to extend to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, the confidence of the Government of Guinea, which greatly appreciates his perceptiveness, his great wisdom and his hard work, which together are opening up new horizons for this Organization.

Despite encouraging results in many areas, the United Nations still faces many challenges that threaten international peace and security and jeopardize the sustainable development of nations. It is the responsibility of the United Nations, in accordance with its purposes and principles, to become more involved in the enduring search for peace, so that the human race, on the eve of the third millennium, can establish a real foundation for the prosperity of all States.

How can one ensure peace and the harmonious development of our States if the international community will not firmly commit itself to identifying and eradicating the deep causes of the many conflicts and imbalances that continue to impede mankind's progress towards greater well-being? At a time when we are preparing to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the world's conscience is still troubled by the indifference of the major players in the international arena in the search for appropriate solutions to the challenges that face us all.

In a number of countries, peoples and individuals are deprived of fundamental rights. Civil wars continue to cause great suffering to innocent victims. It has been shown that respect for fundamental rights, including promotion of the right to development, which underlies all other rights, is an excellent instrument of preventive diplomacy today.

Our session is opening at a time when the Middle East peace process is completely deadlocked. My country is following with great concern recent developments in that part of the world, particularly in the Arab territories occupied by Israel. My delegation is convinced that unless the rights of all the interested parties are taken into account, peace will remain elusive.

The search for peace in the Middle East is a matter of concern to all States, first and foremost the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which on several occasions has called on the Security Council and the General Assembly for greater United Nations involvement in achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East through the return of the occupied Arab territories, the creation of a Palestinian state and respect for the rights of all States in the region to peace and security.

My delegation appeals to all parties concerned, particularly the authorities in Tel Aviv, to ensure strict implementation of the Oslo and Washington agreements, with a view to saving peace and thereby avoid the threat of another crisis that jeopardizes the balance in the subregion and international peace as a whole.

The African continent continues to be a central concern of the international community. There is no need for me to enumerate the many internal conflicts that have occurred in Africa in recent years.

In West Africa, the collective awareness of the member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) of the need to make our subregion a zone of peace, security and stability has contributed, thanks to the resolve shown by our heads of State, to restoring peace in Liberia and has allowed for a return to constitutionality in Sierra Leone.

These achievements, which are the result of the unanimous desire of our peoples to manage their own affairs, also attest to the vitality of the institutions of regional integration as instruments for conflict prevention, management and resolution. Here, I would appeal to the international community for more cooperation with and assistance to the peacekeeping mechanisms initiated by subregional organizations.

There is a need to consolidate the great achievements of the restoration of peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone through massive assistance for their speedy reconstruction, the return of refugees and national reconciliation. If the young people who have been demobilized in these two countries do not quickly find some activity in civilian life, the temptation to return to disorder will remain. To strengthen peace and security in the West African subregion, the international community must help the economies of Liberia and Sierra Leone return to the path of growth.

While ECOWAS and the international community were seeking ways and means to consolidate peace in Sierra Leone and Liberia, another conflict erupted on 7 June 1998 in Guinea-Bissau. The Government of Guinea, which has always advocated dialogue and consultation to resolve conflicts, expressed, from the beginning of this crisis, its grave concern because of the geographic, historical, social and cultural ties uniting Guinea-Bissau and my own country.

The existence of a mutual defence assistance pact, signed on 25 January 1980, and the explicit invitation by the Guinea-Bissau's democratically elected President, President João Bernardo Vieira both justified the sending of a Guinean contingent to Guinea-Bissau to preserve constitutional order and help end the war. Faithful to our policy of peace and dialogue, the Government of Guinea has been working since the beginning of this crisis in the ECOWAS Committee of Seven to find a just, negotiated solution.

We believe that complementary action by the Economic Community of West African States and the contact group of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries will make it possible for us to achieve the objective of restoring peace and security in Guinea-Bissau.

If we are to preserve the achievements of democratization in Africa, the international community must adopt new, more binding legal instruments prohibiting any seizure of power by force and banishing those responsible for such actions at the international, regional and subregional levels. The implementation of such measures will help to strengthen preventive diplomacy and to preserve peace and security within our States, with respect for fundamental human rights.

I cannot end this section of my statement without mentioning the thorny issue of refugees and displaced persons, who are the victims of these crises. My country, the Republic of Guinea, because of its geographic location among three countries facing civil war, has of all the countries in the world the highest proportion of refugees within its territory. Over the last decade, Guinea has taken in more than 700,000 refugees, which is one tenth of our population. This massive and prolonged concentration of people has had serious social, economic and environmental consequences in the areas of Guinea concerned, and is weighing heavily on my country and its economy.

I would like to reiterate here the appeal made by the Government of Guinea for substantial assistance, in accordance with Security Council and ECOWAS resolutions to help the Republic of Guinea bear the burden of these refugees. On behalf of the Government of Guinea, I should like to express our gratitude to those States that have already responded favourably to this appeal.

Concerned about the situation, the United Nations Department of Political Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme organized a special meeting on the Republic of Guinea on 9 and 10 July this year in New York. The Government of Guinea appreciated this welcome initiative by the Secretary-General. We greatly appreciated the recognition by the international community, through the United Nations system, of the great sacrifices made by the people of Guinea to help the refugees from neighbouring countries, and especially the will of the United Nations system to mobilize resources to strengthen Guinea's economic capacity and preserve its stability, so that we can continue to be a small island of peace and prosperity.

I should like to take this opportunity to urge multilateral partners, all our partners, to continue to pursue with us the activities undertaken in support of Guinea, particularly in the area of the environment, which has been seriously degraded by the long-term mass presence of refugees. The future of the water supplies of West Africa is at stake here.

The Republic of Guinea is closely following recent developments in the political situation in the Great Lakes region, particularly the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My delegation is deeply concerned by the risk that the conflict will spill over into the subregion. We urgently appeal to all the parties to the conflict to call an immediate ceasefire and to respect the territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in accordance with the recommendations of the summit of heads of State of the subregion held at Victoria Falls on 7 and 8 September this year.

Promoting the right to development is part of the overall search for greater prosperity for the human race. While tangible political progress has been made in Africa over the last decade, African States still face the challenge of development, indebtedness and the negative impact of a globalization which is not yet fully understood.

This terrible situation, aggravated by the negative impact of internal conflict, is significantly weakening our States and opening them up to new and dangerous forms of foreign greed. The implementation of a policy to gradually reduce the imbalances between rich and developing countries would contribute to the emergence of a true global market by the creation of centres of development on all continents.

Each country in the world should be given every opportunity for development and helped to become part of the world trade system. Despite considerable efforts by African countries towards political and economic restructuring, and towards strengthening their credibility and making their economies more competitive, the economic situation in Africa continues to be critical. If urgent and appropriate measures are not taken, the sacrifices made risk having been in vain.

My Government has already undertaken far-reaching political, economic and structural reforms and hopes that special attention will be given to the situation in Africa. We appeal to the international community and the developed countries to continue to increase official development assistance. Sustained assistance to African countries will enable them to consolidate what they have already achieved and thereby to enter the next millennium with a greater sense of calm. In this respect, the Agenda for Development should be strongly supported, with a view to its effective implementation.

The question of disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is still a concern for my Government. While the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was a significant step forward for the preservation of peace, recent developments in the international arena require the international community as a whole to consider more deeply the underlying causes of the nuclear arms race. It seems clear that as long as imbalances and injustices are not put right, the spectre of proliferation will continue to threaten international peace.

Countries that already possess nuclear weapons have a special responsibility for the preservation of international peace and must shoulder their responsibilities by taking a more active part in strengthening prevention and peacekeeping mechanisms, resolving existing or latent conflicts, ensuring more equitable treatment for States involved in conflict and, finally, making a more substantial contribution to the development of less fortunate nations.

The Government of Guinea believes that only general and complete disarmament can prevent the risk of proliferation. In the subregion of West Africa, the trade in small arms endangers the internal equilibrium of our States. Within the context of conflict prevention in West Africa, subregional cooperation is under way to eradicate this scourge. We invite the other regions of Africa to support this initiative and to work to establish appropriate structures in order to put an end to the illicit trade in small arms and make Africa a zone of peace and security.

The Republic of Guinea welcomes the adoption and signing of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. The National Assembly of Guinea has already ratified this important Convention to show its support for the elimination of landmines, which cause so much suffering to innocent victims.

It is reassuring to note the greater awareness at the global level of the need to end drug-trafficking, whose many consequences dangerously threaten the prosperity of nations. The results of the recent world summit

meeting on drugs will doubtless enable us to further refine our methods to combat the production, distribution, sale and consumption of drugs, which are a real scourge.

The recent adoption in Rome of the Statute of the International Criminal Court was a major milestone in the progress of humankind towards the elimination of serious violations of humanitarian law committed during international or internal conflicts.

As our community prepares to enter the third millennium, it is now more necessary than ever to adapt the United Nations to the requirements of international life. The new challenges facing us will require the adoption of new, more appropriate arrangements to make the twenty-first century one of peace, justice and prosperity within the context of an equitable partnership that is beneficial to all nations.

My delegation is convinced that the United Nations is still the melting pot in which all nations can make their voices heard in the search for just and lasting solutions to their concerns. We therefore believe that the financial capacity of the United Nations must be strengthened. Contributions must be paid on time and in accordance with the established scale. To that end, we must, together, review the way in which the United Nations system functions with a view to adapting it to current and future circumstances.

My delegation believes in the need for the democratization of the United Nations through the restructuring of its principal bodies, such as the Security Council, whose current membership reflects the state of the world in 1945 and no longer corresponds to the political, economic and social realities of the world today. The reform of the principal bodies of our Organization must enable all States to use their national capacities to seek and consolidate international peace.

My country is more committed than ever to the honourable mission of our Organization as set forth in the Charter. Given the many challenges facing us, Guinea believes in the need for all of us to work together to strengthen and preserve humankind's vision of justice, freedom, peace and solidarity. That is what our peoples would have us do.

Address by Mr. Rafic Hariri, Prime Minister and President of the Council of Ministers of the Lebanese Republic

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and President of the Council of Ministers of the Lebanese Republic.

Mr. Rafic Hariri, Prime Minister and President of the Council of Ministers of the Lebanese Republic, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister and President of the Council of Ministers of the Lebanese Republic, His Excellency Mr. Rafic Hariri, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Hariri (Lebanon) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to congratulate Mr. Opertti on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. I would also like to commend the efforts of his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, whom we recently welcomed to our country.

I should also like to place on record our appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. He has been working tirelessly to promote the authority of the United Nations, advocating respect for the international legitimacy for which it stands, especially in the area of finding peaceful solutions to the explosive conflicts that are raging in some parts of the world. The international community has recognized his great achievement when he succeeded a few months ago in defusing an ominous military confrontation in the Arab Gulf region. We hope that this will be followed by similar successes in other volatile situations plaguing different parts of the world.

The hopes that are pinned on the United Nations assume a special meaning at this session, which coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an instrument which Lebanon participated in framing. Today, human rights are a major pillar of the new world order. Respect for human rights has become the yardstick by which the democracy practised in countries is judged. Compliance with the provisions of the Declaration under all circumstances and conditions guarantees not only the peace, security and stability of societies but also the establishment of relations of cooperation and understanding among States.

The United Nations is duty-bound to enhance its independence since it was liberated from the impact of the cold war and of the bipolarity which held sway over international relations in the post-Second World War era. Today, it is called upon to reactivate its role in making and consolidating peace. This task can be achieved primarily by addressing the root causes of conflicts, through preventive diplomacy and through various technical and development assistance programmes in various fields.

It is important here to refer to the fact that international institutions have an important role to play in providing the developing countries with the necessary technical assistance. Such assistance will enable them to take advantage of the accelerated pace of globalization in the field of trade and finance. It will also give these countries sufficient time to adapt and get ready to face the new challenges. This will help many developing countries avoid the negative effects of surging globalization, given the inadequacy of their production capabilities and the absence of a competitive edge. In this regard, Lebanon is effectively contributing to the establishment of a free trade zone specifically in the Arab region while continuing its commitment to the establishment of trade liberalization worldwide.

On the eve of the twenty-first century, the United Nations role requires it to fulfil the tasks of reform and streamlining so that it can keep up with the fast pace of international relations. Thus the reform measures initiated by the Secretary-General must be completed. Furthermore, the reform of the working methods and streamlining of the Security Council to increase its membership and make it more representative should also be completed. Once reformed, different States, particularly small States, will be enabled to participate in the decision-making process relevant to the maintenance of international peace and security.

We commend the efforts that went into the establishment of the International Criminal Court whose Statute was recently adopted in Rome. Lebanon supports the establishment of the Court and is determined to study its Statute positively.

More than ever before, the international community is called upon to promote the peaceful settlement of disputes, especially in extremely sensitive regions of the world. We need also to address the root causes of the problems and thereby to defuse the crises before they turn into full-scale conflagrations.

The time has come to solve pending problems, particularly those of the Middle East region. For instance, a settlement must be found to the question of the three islands in the Gulf disputed by the United Arab Emirates and Iran. Such a settlement should restore the disputed islands to their rightful owners and thus promote peace and stability among the States and the peoples of the region.

If we are truly interested in the promotion of regional and international peace and security, we must work in all seriousness to build a world free from weapons of mass destruction. In this context, we aspire and call for the establishment of a zone free from nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

Five years ago, I was privileged to stand here before the General Assembly to speak about Lebanon and about its commitment to a just and comprehensive peace. From this very rostrum, I declared that Lebanon is committed to the principles of democracy, liberty and human rights, and that it has succeeded in safeguarding these principles even through its darkest moments.

In this context, reference should be made to Lebanon's firm position of condemning terrorism in all its forms and manifestations including political, cultural and economic. We condemn terrorism whether sponsored by States or by individuals. Lebanon condemns attacks against civilians, embassies and diplomatic missions, plane hijacking and any other act that jeopardizes the lives and property of civilians. However, we must stress the importance of distinguishing between terrorism and peoples' rights to resist the forces of foreign occupation in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and in its successive resolutions adopted by the international Organization and other fora, especially the Declaration of the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations.

Lebanon is fully committed to the role of the United Nations and is keen on furthering this role and on safeguarding the equilibrium and integrity of international relations. We therefore believe that it is important for all States, large and small, to commit to the principles of international legitimacy and refrain from undertaking unilateral measures that are driven solely by narrow interests and dictated by expediency.

Today, as we reiterate these constant positions of principle, we can point with confidence to the originality

of our experience in coexistence, which is based on moderation and tolerance, and our firm belief in both deserves to be a living model that should be emulated whenever solutions are sought to the problems of societies afflicted with wars, racial or factional strife all over the world. This is particularly true of societies that are trying to restore civil peace as part of their post-conflict peace-building efforts.

Lebanon, with an open and creative society, a society that is Arab by identity and orientation, has remained united in territory, population and institutions; Lebanon has remained a vibrant oasis of goodwill and beneficial interaction.

As is well known, Lebanon has for the past few years embarked on a reconstruction plan following a protracted devastating war. It has been tirelessly working to regain the prominent cultural and economic position it once held in its region and in the world, depending on God Almighty, then on the will and resourcefulness of its own citizens and on the support of its brothers and the contributions of its friends all over the world.

Throughout this period of reconstruction, Lebanon faced difficult circumstances caused first and foremost by the continued Israeli occupation of parts of its territories and by the continuity of its devastating attacks against its villages and peaceful citizens. These attacks have claimed the lives of many innocent civilians, men, women and children, and wounded many many more. I am confident that the international community still remembers very well the Qana massacre perpetrated by Israel in 1996.

Lebanon has faced a critical stage of its history through the past few years while implementing the reconstruction plans. The only parallel to the intensity of this stage is the determination of the Lebanese people to face the various challenges on more than one front. Lebanon has succeeded in regaining the world's confidence in its ability to play once more a distinguished and shining role in the cultural, economic, commercial and financial fields. Beirut is back to its position as the crossroads of various cultures and civilizations, a fact attested to by the many conferences and the regional and international meetings that were convened there. The United Nations building that Lebanon has recently completed as the focal point for United Nations activities in Lebanon and in the region is proof, if any was needed, of Lebanon's keen interest in the return of international organizations to Beirut.

As an indication of international confidence in our performance, the world financial markets traded in treasury bonds issued by the Lebanese Government and institutions of the private sector. This was made possible by the cooperation between the Lebanese financial institutions and their international counterparts. It is a demonstration of the confidence that the world has in the present and future of the national economy and of the confidence of the Lebanese themselves in their country and its future.

But to date, Israel has not wanted to meet its commitments; it has not done what it promised to the Palestinians and to the international community; it does not want to resume the negotiations with Lebanon and with Syria from the point at which they left off.

We invite the institutions of the international community to play a more effective role in securing compliance with the resolutions of international legitimacy. They must bring the necessary pressure to bear on the aggressor to remove the causes of this conflict and lay the foundations of a just and comprehensive peace.

Israel cannot merely pay lip service to peace and expect to be considered a truly peace-loving State. Talking about peace is one thing; Israel's actions on the ground are another. Israel's claim that it is a weak country surrounded by hostile neighbours is one thing; Israel's military might, based on weapons of mass destruction, nuclear weapons and state-of-the-art Western weaponry, is another. Israel has all those weapons and is the mightiest Power in the Middle East. But it does not want to implement or respect the resolutions of international legitimacy.

We went to the Madrid Peace Conference with the other Arab parties sincerely hoping to achieve a just, permanent and comprehensive peace that would end the continued cycle of violence that has engulfed our region over the past 50 years. The negotiations on the Palestinian track remain in a vicious circle, and the repercussions of Israeli intransigence could very well shatter our hopes for peace; the negotiations on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks have come to a complete standstill as a result of the intransigent position of the Israeli Government.

We reaffirm our permanent commitment to the noble objective of achieving peace. We have previously declared that the accomplishment of this goal lies in the

full, immediate and unconditional implementation of United Nations resolutions. On this occasion, we reiterate our total rejection of any settlement of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. We call upon the international community to increase its voluntary contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) pending the implementation of international resolutions relative to refugees, particularly resolution 194 (III).

As we repeat our commitment to a just, comprehensive and permanent peace, we declare that we in Lebanon and in Syria are ready to resume the negotiations from where they were stopped. We are ready to sign a peace treaty with Israel within three months, on the condition that it withdraws from the South, from the West Beqaa, and from the Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967. Peace negotiations aimed at achieving a just and comprehensive peace — the peace that we always proclaimed our desire to achieve — can only be accomplished on the basis of the Madrid terms of reference, in accordance with the principle of land for peace. These should be pursued on two parallel, inseparable tracks with Israel: the Lebanese negotiation track and the Syrian negotiation track.

The interdependence of the twin tracks was a strategic decision dictated by the supreme interests of both Lebanon and Syria. This interdependence enhances the prospects of a just, permanent and comprehensive peace. We have previously declared, and we repeat today before this assembly of nations, that neither Lebanon nor Syria will sign a separate peace agreement with Israel. Lebanon and Syria are committed to the resolutions of international legitimacy. We continue to be committed to peace as a strategic choice.

Peace as we see it is a peace built on justice, a peace that will restore usurped rights to their rightful owners fully and without diminution. Any initiatives that ignore these principles and bases are nothing more than manoeuvres predestined to failure. They will only prolong the conflict with all that this implies in terms of squandering the human and economic resources of all concerned. They will further postpone the permanent, just and comprehensive peace which we still uphold and aspire to. To us, this will always be the only viable means to achieve the prosperity and progress of our people and of the other peoples of the region.

The voices that were recently raised calling for the establishment of military alliances in the region on the pretext of confronting certain trends of thought can only be seen as attempts to bring the region back to the atmosphere of alliances and confrontation. Time and again, history has proven these to be harmful to the interests of peoples. They can only lead to negative results that will obstruct the peace process.

So long as the Israeli occupation and assaults against our people continue, we shall continue to uphold our right to resist occupation and to use all legitimate means to which peoples who have had to endure the injustices and evils of occupation have resorted previously. The Lebanese resistance in southern Lebanon and the West Beqaa is in pursuit of a legitimate right supported and endorsed by the entire Lebanese people. The Lebanese people who, like other peoples whose lands have been occupied, have been resisting occupation, and appeal to the international community to spare no effort in helping to secure the release of its citizens who are incarcerated in Israeli prisons and in detention camps under Israeli control in the occupied Lebanese territories. Hundreds of our sons have been languishing in Israeli jails and detention camps for years. Some have already served the prison sentences handed down by Israeli courts, yet are still in custody for reasons unknown to anyone. Others have been in custody for years but have not yet been arraigned. Their incarceration continues under an arbitrary measure that Israel calls "administrative detention".

We have been trying to secure the release of all Lebanese detainees from Israeli jails with the assistance of friendly and brotherly States and with the active involvement of the International Committee of the Red Cross. We appeal to the United Nations and to other international humanitarian agencies to give this matter their utmost attention. We also call upon them to plead with Israel to improve the living conditions of these prisoners, who live in unbearable, inhumane circumstances that run counter to international laws and conventions.

Lebanon finds itself today twice victimized. On the one hand, it has to endure continued devastating attacks by Israel, attacks that can be justified only under one rubric: Israel's stubborn clinging to its occupation and to the flimsy pretext of security. On the other hand, Lebanon sees how the international community is incapable of doing what it takes to restore its legitimate rights through compliance with the just resolutions adopted by this international Organization, in particular Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which calls for

unconditional Israeli withdrawal from the Lebanese territories. Lebanon, which for 50 years has dearly paid for the establishment of Israel, suffers from the double standards which have so far obstructed the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

The United Nations, which has made continuous efforts, and whose peacekeeping forces have made the ultimate sacrifice, in the South, remains the best witness to the indiscriminate nature and ferocity of the Israeli attacks against the Lebanese. The United Nations peacekeeping forces have repeatedly been the direct target of Israeli bombardment, including the 1996 shelling of the headquarters of a battalion of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, in Qana, which was the scene of a heinous massacre in which scores of Lebanese lost their lives. Here we would like to pay tribute to the fallen soldiers of the United Nations who have died in Lebanon, victims of Israeli acts of aggression. Lebanon considers them to be its martyrs too. From this rostrum, we honour their memory. We salute each and every member of the United Nations peacekeeping Force stationed in Lebanon. We express special thanks and appreciation to the friendly States that have contributed troops to that Force. On the occasion of the departure of the Norwegian battalion that has worked in Lebanon for over two decades, allow me to express, on behalf of the people and the Government of Lebanon, our thanks and gratitude to the Norwegian people and Government for their enduring commitment to and participation in the Force. Many members of the Norwegian battalion sacrificed their lives in the line of duty.

Lebanon has the right to demand that the international community and the United Nations, which represents international legitimacy, should make every effort to secure Israel's compliance with international resolutions and its withdrawal from its territories.

Lebanon, which believes in peace, will work with its brothers to consolidate this peace and make it a foundation for a new life in the Middle East region. Achieving this noble objective will not only translate just resolutions into tangible action, but it will also further the confidence of small States and nations in an authority that will guarantee their rights, their very existence and their future.

In conclusion, I would like to address the Israeli people to tell them that the Arabs, specifically Lebanon and Syria, have taken a strategic decision, namely the peace option, which is the difficult choice. This is the strategic option which we uphold and for which we work in the interest of the future of our nation and that of our children. For peace to be realized, Israel also has to follow suit for the sake of the future of its children. Peace requires courage and a broad vision of the future. Lebanon and Syria have made their choice. Will Israel make the same choice?

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and President of the Council of Ministers of the Lebanese Republic for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Rafic Hariri, Prime Minister and President of the Council of Ministers of the Lebanese Republic, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, Her Excellency Ms. Zdenka Kramplová.

Ms. Kramplová (Slovakia): First of all, I wish to congratulate the President on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session and to express my sincere belief that under his leadership this session of the General Assembly will carry out successfully the tasks that the international community expects this global forum to deal with.

I would also like to thank Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko for his work and contribution to the successful completion of the last session of the General Assembly.

In this period of significant global political and economic changes, the world needs a modern and effective United Nations that is capable of dealing with issues of importance to all of mankind in a proper and flexible manner. Slovakia believes that the ongoing process of reform of the United Nations will contribute substantively to this goal. It gives its full support to the swift implementation of the reform measures initiated by the Secretary-General in his basic report on reform.

The Slovak Republic welcomes the proposal to designate the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly as the Millennium Assembly. We expect that the Millennium Assembly will provide Member States an opportunity to formulate answers to questions about the strategic goals of the United Nations for the next millennium in the field of international peace and security and economic cooperation. We assume that the report on the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century that the Secretary-General intends to present to the

General Assembly in the year 2000 will provide a thorough evaluation of the results achieved in specific areas of United Nations activities.

The Slovak Republic supports a Security Council reform that would enhance its representative character, its working methods and the transparency of its work, as well as preserve the Council's capability to act promptly. The reform should result in an adequate representation of individual regional groups and accommodate a legitimate claim of the Eastern European regional Group and other States to a new non-permanent seat in the Security Council. Let us keep in mind that the number of members of the Eastern European Group has doubled over the past few years.

Slovakia supports the efforts to reach a consensus on the reform in the area of United Nations financing, favouring the principle of capacity to pay. In any case, much of the tension can be solved through the regular contributions by Member States to the relevant United Nations budgets.

The Slovak Republic supports the idea of the exclusively peaceful use of nuclear energy and is a strong advocate of unconditional and universal observance of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). Slovakia actively participates in the Preparatory Committee for the 2000 sixth Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT, and in this context fully supports the universality of the NPT and the CTBT. In March of this year, Slovakia completed the ratification process of the CTBT. This confirms our active approach in this area.

We appreciate the highly qualified and objective expertise of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), both in the field of elimination of the nuclear military threat and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Slovakia fully supported the activities of the International Atomic Energy Agency known as programme "93+2" for strengthening the effectiveness and improving the efficiency of the safeguards system. I have the honour to inform the Assembly that the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency approved at its session in September the additional protocol to the safeguards agreement between Slovakia and the International Atomic Energy Agency. Early entry into force of the additional protocol will be a high priority for Slovak authorities.

Slovakia pays very close attention to the issue of landmines. The ratification of the Ottawa Convention is in the internal legislative process. We believe that the Ottawa process and the Conference on Disarmament are complementary. Slovakia — which has experience in demining devices and technologies, and has capacities in education and training in mine clearance — would like to play an active role in the process of the total elimination of anti-personnel landmines.

In the area of biological weapons, the Slovak Republic supports improving the verification system of the Biological Weapons Convention, as well as the elimination of the illegal transfer of these weapons.

Slovakia supports the efforts of the United Nations aimed at conflict resolution through the strengthening of United Nations capacities in the field of preventive diplomacy, early warning systems and effective use of United Nations peacekeeping operations. Slovakia's active participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations is proof of our continuing commitment. At present, Slovakia is participating in three peacekeeping operations, and it is prepared to provide troops to other missions as well.

My country supports the United Nations efforts to strengthen its capacity for rapid deployment of United Nations peacekeeping forces, especially in further developing the concept of United Nations stand-by arrangements, as well as a rapidly deployable mission headquarters.

In the process of post-conflict peace-building, it is of the utmost importance that a multifunctional approach in close coordination with regional institutions and non-governmental and humanitarian organizations should be strictly observed.

One of the global problems that poses an ever increasing threat to humankind is terrorism. Slovakia has always rejected terrorism and strongly condemns all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable, wherever and by whomsoever committed. The joint efforts of all States are a vital precondition for successful fight against this evil.

The year 1998 will witness two important human rights anniversaries — the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fifth anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights. Both these events represent an appropriate framework and provide the impetus for the further

promotion, protection and development of human rights at the threshold of the twenty-first century.

In a year which will mark two important anniversaries in the field of human rights, the Government of the Slovak Republic approved the country's accession to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which I had the honour to sign on 22 September last.

The Slovak Republic attaches great importance to international economic cooperation and to the important role of the Economic and Social Council in this process.

In the framework of regional cooperation, Slovakia favours respect for the specific needs of individual regions. We welcome, therefore, the activities of the Economic Commission for Europe aimed at broadening cooperation with the private business sector and non-governmental organizations. Slovakia is interested in a more intensive participation in the development programmes of the United Nations specialized institutions and is preparing its own concept of development assistance, whose objective is to increase Slovakia's participation in programmes for developing countries.

The Slovak Republic, as a member of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council and the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, takes an active approach to issues of environmental protection and sustainable development.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/201, the Government of the Slovak Republic offered to host the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Bratislava this year. In total 169 parties to the Convention took part in the Conference under the presidency of the Minister of the Environment of the Slovak Republic. The successful outcome of the Conference reaffirmed the commitment of all parties to conserve biological diversity for future generations. The fact that the Government of the Slovak Republic hosted that Conference confirms the importance we attach to the protection of environment and sustainable development.

As an emerging donor country, Slovakia is investigating ways of providing humanitarian assistance on a bilateral basis. A very important element in the process of humanitarian assistance, especially in crisis regions, is ensuring the security of humanitarian personnel, and the Slovak Republic is ready to give its support to all United Nations measures aimed at reinforcing this security.

The recent twentieth special session of the General Assembly devoted to countering the world drug problem together was an important milestone in the joint efforts of the international community in the fight against drugs. It is a great achievement that for the first time in history a consensus was reached between producer and consumer countries on the need to eliminate the threat of drugs through parallel and considered action in both priority areas: decreasing the demand for drugs and decreasing the production of drugs.

To coordinate drug control activities at the regional level, the Slovak Republic is ready to secure the establishment in Bratislava of a regional United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) office for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

We appreciate that the Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court in Rome was successfully completed, and we believe that in the foreseeable future a permanent criminal court will be established in order to punish the most serious crimes against humanity and, moreover, to prevent them.

We believe that progress in the preparation of an international legal document on the elimination of nuclear terrorism will be achieved during this session of the General Assembly. We also expect further substantial progress in the discussion on the jurisdictional immunity of States and State property prepared by the International Law Commission.

The United Nations contributes not only to the progressive development of international law and its codification but also — in particular through its main judicial authority, the International Court of Justice — to the peaceful solution of disputes between States in accordance with international law. The Slovak Republic has gained its first experience of ICJ proceedings. It welcomed the Court's Judgment in the case concerning the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Project, which confirmed the validity of the treaty between Slovakia and Hungary concerning the construction and operation of the project on the Danube. The Slovak Republic is sincerely interested in the implementation of the Judgment, which would be based on an agreement with Hungary reached, if necessary, with the further help of the International Court of Justice.

An active and effective participation of Slovakia in the United Nations is one of our foreign policy priorities. To achieve this objective, Slovakia meets all its commitments under the United Nations Charter in full and is consistently intensifying its engagement in all areas of the United Nations system. The candidature of the Slovak Republic for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council for the term 2000-2001 is the logical result of this approach. I should like to stress that my country, which belongs to the group of small and medium-sized States, is prepared to be fully responsible for bearing its fair share of the global responsibility connected with membership in the Security Council.

As we approach the third millennium, a considerable part of humankind is still facing poverty, violence, violations of human rights and the effects of war. The millions of people on this planet affected look to the international community, and the United Nations in particular, with great hope. Whether we will succeed in reforming the United Nations together into a strong, politically efficient and financially healthy system that will be able to meet the expectations of current and future generations depends on the will and commitment of all of us.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Mr. Jozias van Aartsen, on whom I now call.

Mr. van Aartsen (Netherlands) (*interpretation from French*): I speak to this Assembly with a sense of deference and humility. Deference, because I realize that I am speaking to the greatest multilateral organization of all time and from a rostrum where have stood almost all the great statesmen since the Second World War.

Humility because I was appointed just two months ago to the post of Minister for Foreign Affairs, and so I am a newcomer for most of the delegates. However, this is no way detracts from the pride that I feel regarding my country's long commitment to the United Nations system and the support that this Organization has enjoyed in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

I would also like to add that I feel reassured to realize that most of what I was going to say to the Assembly has already been said in the statement made by the Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs on behalf of the European Union.

(spoke in English)

Article 23 of the United Nations Charter says that the General Assembly shall elect 10 non-permanent members of the Security Council. More to the point, the Article goes on to say that the Assembly, in doing so, must pay due regard

> "in the first instance to the contribution of Members of the United Nations to the maintenance of international peace and security and to the other purposes of the Organization".

Well, my country at present is up for election to the Security Council. In fact, elections are due to be held in this very Hall in a few weeks time. And so it seems only fair for the Kingdom of the Netherlands, as a candidate for the Council, to explain where it stands: where it stands on some of the core issues now faced by the United Nations family, where its stands on the state of affairs in the Organization and where it stands on the Organization's future. In other words, what is the electorate looking at?

What the electorate is looking at is what I would describe as a nation responding. Throughout the Kingdom people hear the wants of the world, the needs of our neighbours and of people in peril. It is in keeping with the Dutch character to be penny-pinching but generous to those in distress, to be demanding but tough on ourselves as well, to hold strong views but carry a big heart — easily critical, prone to compassion.

In much the same manner we look at this Organization. We look at the Charter as a true monument of modern times. We feel a strong commitment to multilateralism, for reasons of principle and for reasons of necessity. We seek to promote the institutions of worldwide cooperation, with the United Nations at the core. Together, they span the entire range of human activity. We shall go on to give it the best we can offer in the form of ideas and in the form of resources.

I would like to demonstrate how seriously we take our Charter obligations by showing how, over the years, we have pursued the purposes of the United Nations, as spelled out by the Charter in Article 1. First, peace and security. It is perhaps the most thankless responsibility the United Nations carries. Indeed, the odds are overwhelming. Since 1945, the number of violent conflicts outstanding has risen from 4 to about 40. Their average length has grown from about two months to an

average of 14.5 months in 1995. Peace and security is where we have learned our lessons the hard way, and more mistakes are bound to be made. We, the Member States, need to shape up.

Meanwhile, the Dutch commitment to United Nations peacekeeping is borne out by our record. The Netherlands has taken part in 20 peacekeeping operations so far, is currently engaged in three of them and is getting ready to join a fourth one. Most recently, some 100 Dutch troops were stationed in Cyprus, where they are committed to keeping the two Cypriot communities at peace. All in all, some 1,650 Dutch troops are engaged in peacekeeping and multinational supervision. In fact, peacekeeping operations continue to form one of the principal tasks of our armed forces, and we remain ready to participate in up to four different peacekeeping efforts simultaneously at the level of a battalion.

Peacekeeping does not stand by itself. There should be a comprehensive response to the need for conflict management. We believe in a continuum between prevention, on the one hand, and reconstruction and development on the other hand. After all, many of the conflicts raging today take place in the developing world. Affluent societies cannot in good conscience walk away from a conflict once the smoke has cleared. Donor countries cannot turn their backs to the ravages of war and concentrate on the next CNN headlines. We believe that emergency aid and political initiatives should be teamed with longer-term development planning, reconstruction and reconciliation. We believe in building a bridge between conflict and development.

Another pillar of Dutch foreign policy is our strong desire to ban weapons of mass destruction. Our objective remains strengthening the non-proliferation regime, supporting real progress in negotiations on the reduction of nuclear weapons, and making existing conventions on other mega-weapons effective and more reliable.

Still, we are not talking only about mega-weapons. The transfer of small arms is a matter of concern for us as well. They are piling up fast, most of them illicit. In many countries they constitute a serious threat to the population and to national and regional security and even contribute to the destabilization of States.

Landmines are the plague of modern warfare, leaving a disgraceful legacy of the present century to the next one. Once in the ground, they keep. To this day people are maimed or killed in Ypres, Belgium, by landmines put in place during the first strategic use of them, over 80 years ago. Mine clearance and banning anti-personnel landmines have been pursued with renewed vigour in recent years, and with due reason.

I now turn to the second of the purposes of the United Nations: developing friendly relations among nations. Let me point to the manner and measure in which the Netherlands has contributed towards this.

By geographical necessity, the Netherlands has always been a seafaring nation, a nation of traders. Besides making us the eighth largest trading nation in the world, it has made us an outward-looking people, internationally oriented. Also, it has made us a multicultural society. Over 20 per cent of our population have their origins abroad — in Africa, in Asia, in the Arab world and in the Americas.

Over time, we have built up strong relations with countries of all regions. Two constituent parts of our Kingdom, that is to say the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, are located in the Americas. Our Caribbean Kingdom partners have important political and economic relations with their regional friends. They are engaged in the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in the Organization of American States (OAS) and in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Rightfully, Africa is high on the Netherlands' political and development agendas. We encourage and support African countries in establishing peace, stability and democracy. We assist African nations in building up their mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution. We help Africa in strengthening its place in the world economy — for instance, through the World Trade Organization. Dutch aid flows to all countries of Africa — last year over $600 million worth.

Turning now to Asia, the relations between the Netherlands and a large number of Asian countries go back to the sixteenth century. We are an original member of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Naturally, therefore, we have assisted Asian countries that have been hit by the financial crisis and its economic and social effects. We do so through multilateral channels and through joint European and Asian initiatives. Overcoming the crisis is important, too, for political stability in the region.

As regards Central and Eastern Europe, the Netherlands is heavily engaged in assisting countries of that region in their transition to market economy and democracy. Our involvement is a central feature in our relations with all candidates for accession to the European Union. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, we are at present the third most important donor, and we contribute to the Stabilization Force and to various organizations engaged in the region.

The Netherlands and the Arab world have long-standing economic and cultural ties. The University of Leyden has traditionally been a leading centre for the study of Islam and Arab culture. We have a growing Arab community in the Netherlands. We continue to give substantial support to the Palestinian people and are a major donor to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

The third purpose of the United Nations, as spelt out in Article 1 of the Charter, is by far the most complex. Its binding element is the promotion of international cooperation, but cooperation in fields that, taken together, cover a wide range of human interaction. I would like to highlight some of them, without, of course, meaning to diminish any of the others. Notably, I will touch on development cooperation, human rights, and international law.

Poverty eradication has been the primary focus of Dutch development aid policy for over a quarter of a century. The Netherlands, whose aid programme last year ran close to $3 billion, has actively tried to strike a balance in its aid policy between the economy, the environment and the people. We are pursuing development that is sustainable — sustainable not purely in terms of ecology but in a wider sense: development that addresses basic human needs, that respects human rights, that builds human capacities, that is socially responsible and that does not mortgage the choices of future generations.

For many years, my country has been more than faithful to the international target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for development. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development average hovers around 0.25 per cent. The Netherlands stands at a self-imposed 0.8 per cent. In percentage terms, it takes third place among the major donors. In absolute terms, in money spent, it has made us the sixth largest donor country worldwide for 1997.

All in all, $750 million from Dutch resources flowed to the United Nations system and to the Bretton Woods institutions in 1997. The new Netherlands Government is a strong believer in multilateral development cooperation. In its first major policy statement, it pledged that multilateral aid flows, including those to the United Nations system, are going to be expanded over the next several years.

As the Charter says explicitly, international cooperation applies also to promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We have made no secret of our attachment to the cause of human rights in the past; nor do we intend to hide it in the years to come. The Netherlands has been an active player in the Commission on Human Rights since at least 1980, has seen several of its countrymen serve in prominent human rights positions, has either drafted or supported countless resolutions and has strongly advocated standard-setting and monitoring. It is a topic that enjoys solid support in Dutch society and has constituted a clear political imperative for a quarter of a century. Member States can count on our toeing the line in the future.

Promoting respect for the rule of law at the international level has been recognized as part of our heritage ever since Hugo Grotius, in the early 1600s. In modern times, the Netherlands has sought to contribute to the advancement of international law. Areas where we have made contributions include human rights, legal cooperation, crime prevention, criminal justice and so forth. Much of the groundwork for the International Criminal Court was done under Dutch chairmanship.

If indeed we are to serve on the Security Council, what will be our aims in the next two years? Our aim is the primacy of international law. Our aim is building bridges. Our aim is addressing all issues before the Council. Our aim is more contact between non-members and the Council. And our aim is openness and transparency. In a nutshell, we will be driven by idealism, but guided by realism. It is in that spirit that we approach our membership in the Council and, indeed, the future of this Organization.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece, His Excellency Mr. Theodoros Pangalos.

Mr. Pangalos (Greece): I wish first to extend to the President my warm congratulations on his assumption of

the conduct of the current session. Uruguay has indeed a major role to play in international developments, both at the regional and the international level.

I also wish to congratulate the current President's predecessor, Mr. Udovenko, for his performance during the fifty-second session. My congratulations and support are also addressed to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who has deployed enormous efforts not only to keep United Nations services running, but also to further enhance their efficiency through the ongoing reform process. His political skills have been demonstrated in settling disputes which threaten international peace and security.

The Austrian Foreign Minister delivered a statement on behalf of the European Union to which my Government fully subscribes. I would like to elaborate further on some particular issues.

Greece consistently endeavours for peace and security — security in political and socio-economic terms, security through human dignity and through international law and order.

In that spirit, Greece welcomes the establishment by the Rome Conference of an International Criminal Court.

We hope that the Preparatory Committee, to convene in the wake of the Conference, will decisively tackle the remaining definition aspects of the crime of aggression.

Greece considers disarmament and non-proliferation to be guarantees of international peace. In the nuclear field, we welcome two significant developments: the signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the decision reached in Geneva to negotiate a treaty banning the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons and other explosive nuclear devices.

My country shares the general concern about nuclear tests. We also concur with the general recommendations on the issue, namely, adherence to the comprehensive test ban and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, as well as compliance with the international rules. Bacteriological and toxin weapons, known as the nuclear weapons of the poor, remain a threat to humanity. Reinforcement of the relevant Convention remains an urgent priority.

The Ottawa Treaty on anti-personnel landmines made history by totally banning their use. We urge those countries, particularly in the sensitive south-eastern European area, that have yet to accede to this Treaty to seriously consider the humanitarian aspect of this exercise and act accordingly.

Peacekeeping plays a major role in staving off crises. Greece has taken an active part in a wide range of United Nations operations, such as the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission, and in the Western Sahara, in Georgia, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in the United Nations humanitarian mission in Iraq and Operation ALBA in Albania. Greece also provides annually a significant financial contribution to the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus.

The United Nations needs adequate resources and means in order to carry out its mandate. Greece has voluntarily accepted a higher percentage in the scale of assessments and pays its contributions to the Organization in full and on time.

Combating drugs is a high political priority for the Greek Government. Greece closely followed the proceedings of the General Assembly's special session on the international drug problem. Last June, my country's commitment in the fight against drugs was reflected in its chairing the regional Dublin Group formation for the Balkans and the near Middle East.

From its establishment, the modern Greek State has proclaimed that no discrimination based on colour, race or ethnic origin would be tolerated on its territory, while the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all individuals who set foot on it would be fully protected. We have made a tradition of adhering to, implementing and supporting compliance with the human rights norms set by United Nations instruments and major conventions.

The President returned to the Chair.

The restructuring and new membership of the Security Council rightly elicit our attention. The enlargement of the Security Council should be based both on the criteria of the United Nations Charter and on the ongoing realities. We understand that major regional organizations, such as the European Union, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Arab League, the Organization of American States, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Southern African Development Community, the South Pacific Forum and other important forums have a special responsibility in identifying those countries which, by evident commitment to principles enshrined in the

Charter, may further subscribe and contribute to its goals. On the other hand, 53 years after the signing of the United Nations Charter in San Francisco, we have to acknowledge the new realities, such as the collapse of the bipolar system and the emergence of new stabilizing factors all over the world.

The future of this body of countries with limited membership, regardless of their geographical location or ideological orientation, calls for our consideration. We hope that a renewed effort of the Open-ended Working Group, under your guidance, Sir, will eventually reach a compromise solution.

Concerning the world economy, I share the view that globalization presents us with an array of opportunities and potential benefits. Nevertheless, it also entails increased risks. The international community has to make full use of the international financial institutions and instruments to weather crises and respond to the challenges of globalization. No effort should be spared to help developing countries, and in particular the least developed among them, to avoid marginalization through globalization.

Two very important aspects of the effort to better integrate developing countries into the world economy merit our consideration: first, the rapid and determined extension of debt relief, within the terms of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative; and secondly, improved market access so that developing countries can effectively benefit from the trade opportunities that the Uruguay Round offers. In this respect, financing for development assistance remains an additional element of paramount importance.

In the field of environment and sustainable development, Greece supports the work of the appropriate United Nations Commission. The significance of this forum invites me to recall a grave problem: the threat to the environment resulting from the expansion of nuclear-power production plants, particularly when they are located in areas subject to earthquakes, neighbouring sea traffic and inadequate infrastructure. In addition, we are deeply concerned by the increasing stockpiling of nuclear wastes and shipments of radioactive materials, threatening the lives and properties of developing countries' populations, in particular those of the vast South Pacific area.

Turning to my country's presence in regional organizations, may I recall the active role played by Greece in the Council of Europe through the Committee of Ministers, which it currently chairs. Among the issues on its agenda, I note the European Court of Human Rights, which will enhance the protection of human rights at the European level.

In the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Greece is involved in every effort aimed at promoting the notion of comprehensive security. With regard to activities in the human dimension, I simply mention my country's contribution in the field of elections observation.

Greece was happy to attend, as a guest, the twelfth Non-Aligned Movement summit held recently in Durban, South Africa. Its keynote was clearly the shape and scope that a movement born in a bipolar, confrontational world could claim in the coming millennium, ushered in by globalization. The message of the Durban declaration deserves our attention and consideration.

A year has elapsed since I expressed in this very forum the hope that Turkey would finally abandon its intransigent policies on Cyprus. It has proven to be a vain hope. This was a year of stagnation and frustration. Frustrated have been the efforts of Secretary-General Kofi Annan and his Special Adviser, Mr. Cordovez, to relaunch the intercommunal talks. Special envoys from several countries, including members of the Security Council, hoping to unblock the situation, came back frustrated from Ankara and the occupied part of Cyprus. Frustrated remain the hopes of the European Union to bring the Turkish Cypriot together with the Greek Cypriot in a prosperous State of Cyprus that is a member of the European family.

The reaction from Ankara, obediently echoed by the Turkish Cypriot leadership, has been one of harsh rejection, either in terms of a flat negation or by imposing conditions tantamount to cancelling what has been desired by the international community, prescribed by United Nations resolutions and even accepted by the Turkish Cypriot leadership itself.

Such an attitude of rejection is easily explained by the notorious designs of the Turkish Government to effect the partition of Cyprus. Mr. Ecevit, Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey, has on several occasions said that the Cyprus question was resolved once and for all by his country's armed forces' invasion in 1974. Twenty-four years after the invasion, Cyprus remains a divided island and the Turkish occupation forces increase their presence and weaponry, even denying their victims the right to

effectively defend themselves. Twenty-four years is enough. It is time for the international community to strongly support the Secretary-General in fulfilling his mandate of bringing the two communities to the negotiating table to initiate a dialogue on gradual disarmament towards the complete demilitarization of the island.

Greece wishes to establish good-neighbourly relations with Turkey, based on the principles of international law and respect for international treaties.

The International Court of Justice at The Hague, whose compulsory jurisdiction has been accepted by Greece, is the appropriate legal forum for the settlement of problems in our relations. A positive response by Turkey to that effect would constitute a step towards the beginning of a new period of mutual understanding.

Greece pursues a policy promoting stability, good-neighbourly relations, cooperation and economic development in South-Eastern Europe. We participate in international projects or take our own initiatives, in the context of bilateral or multilateral schemes. We offer troops and counselling, funds and food. Greece offers to its neighbours and the region a much needed feeling of trust and security.

My country accords a high priority to our relations with Albania. We welcome the efforts of the Albanian Government to further pursue the process of normalization of democratic institutions and its close cooperation with the international community. Greece considers it its duty to stand by Albania in its efforts to overcome the serious difficulties it faces.

In the neighbouring Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and more particularly in the area of Kosovo, the situation has reached a critical point. The vicious circle of the use of force must be halted. The refugees and displaced persons must be allowed to return to their homes safely, without delay. Greece has sent humanitarian assistance to alleviate the plight of the refugees in northern Albania. We welcome the setting up of the Albanian negotiating group, and support the immediate start of negotiations with a view to arriving, as soon as possible, at a peaceful and negotiated solution on the future autonomy status of Kosovo, within the internationally recognized borders of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Terrorist acts and indiscriminate and disproportionate repression are unacceptable. Greece has actively participated, and will actively participate, in all international efforts aimed at securing a peaceful solution in Kosovo.

In Bosnia, Greece notes with satisfaction the progress achieved so far in the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. We maintain close relations with the Bosnian parties and offer substantial contributions to efforts aimed at ensuring the stability and development of this country. Greek soldiers participate in the Stabilization Force (SFOR) as well as in international observer missions. Important programmes undertaken by the Greek Government in the framework of the donors conference, held in 1997, are about to be completed.

In our relations with Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Romania, the promotion of mutually beneficial cooperation in all fields is of paramount importance.

In the multilateral field, Greece is committed to, and actively involved in, such regional schemes as the South-Eastern Europe cooperation process, the Royaumont Initiative, the South-East Europe Cooperative Initiative and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. We note with satisfaction that South-Eastern Europe leaders will meet again this year in Antalya, Turkey, thus consolidating the process we initiated last year in Crete.

In the Middle East, the present stagnation underlines the urgent need to reactivate the peace process. Its revival will bring hope for peace and prosperity. Once more, we stress the need for full implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions and agreements, and we urge the parties to make every effort to achieve real peace, which should be a just, lasting and global peace. Greece welcomes any endeavour likely to produce positive results, while supporting the initiatives undertaken by the European Union's special envoy in the Middle East. Successful meetings organized by the special envoy and the Greek Government bring together prominent Israelis and Palestinians in a conciliatory spirit. These meetings will, hopefully, be institutionalized as the "Athens Dialogue for Peace and Cooperation in the Middle East".

The Mediterranean remains our life companion. We have been the pioneers for the adoption of a European Union Mediterranean policy, accompanied by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (MEDA) regulation, through which financial aid to the countries concerned is considerably increased.

The African continent is an emerging reality that will affect the future of humanity. However, progress in the fields of political pluralism and economic stabilization

has been coupled, over the course of the last year, with regression in the form of ruinous civil wars or border conflicts in a number of African countries. The international community should stand by the African nations and their organizations on the eve of the twenty-first century, advocating the need for good-neighbourly relations and, within the countries themselves, democratic rule, respect for human rights and an open market economy.

Greece shares the general concern about the developments in Asia. The financial turmoil is by no means settled. Indeed, it is still sending disturbing vibrations through the European and world economies. Asia can, however, overcome the crisis. Allowing external or internal tensions to drag on, with the prospect of escalation, obviously spells future disaster, in terms of chasing or scaring foreign investment out of the area and of funnelling precious funds to such dangerous and vain projects as the production of weapons of mass destruction.

Greece follows closely and contributes actively to the historical process of eastern European countries' reintegration into the European system. Our political credo and vision is that of a Europe without dividing lines and scars from the past. In this context, Greece supports the enlargement of the European Union with the 10 candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe, together with Cyprus, advocating the simultaneous launching of a global and inclusive accession process with all candidate countries.

Greece also extends its institutional links and promotes its historical, economic and cultural ties with the Russian Federation and the Ukraine and the other newly independent States in the Caucasus, Black Sea and Central Asia.

Our excellent relations with the United States and Canada are further enhanced through political and military cooperation in peacemaking initiatives and peacekeeping activities in South-Eastern Europe, as well as cooperation in preventing and eliminating terrorism. Furthermore, Greece, as a member of the European Union, stands for a broad transatlantic dialogue and the advancement of the New Trans-Atlantic Agenda.

Greece has traditional ties of friendship with the countries of Latin America, and, both bilaterally and as a member of the European Union, systematically supports ongoing, comprehensive dialogue and cooperation with them.

Until very recently Greece had been a recipient of development assistance, but for three years now we have been an important contributor, equal to the standards of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). We may not be such a wealthy country, but we are trying to grant effective and qualitative assistance to those interested in it and in need of it, using our experience to make this as beneficial as possible, supporting the struggle against poverty and famine and for economic and social development, and also trying to help promote human rights, democracy and institutions of civil society.

I would like also to refer briefly to an issue which is of particular concern to my country, the Olympic Games. Inspired by the Olympic Ideal, Greece presented on 4 February 1998 to the International Olympic Committee in Nagano, Japan, a comprehensive proposal outlining a set of organizational structures and a broad range of activities aimed at the practical realization of an Olympic Truce at the Athens Games of 2004 and at the strengthening of the role of the Olympic Movement. In order to support these important activities, Greece proposed the establishment of an international centre for the Olympic Truce, at the very site of ancient Olympia.

Further, Greece took the initiative and proposed the creation of a cultural Olympics for the first time in contemporary world. This would strengthen dialogue among different cultures the world over. This proposal was welcomed by the International Olympic Committee, and preparatory work has already started between the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Olympic Committee and the Greek Government.

I would like to spare the delegates another pre-electoral speech. As the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands preceded me, I had to scale down my speech and become very modest, but I cannot avoid referring to the candidacy of Greece for the 1999-2000 term for one of the two non-permanent seats allocated to the Group of Western European and Other States on the Security Council.

My Government has legitimate and justified ambitions for requesting the support of United Nations member countries to such a distinction. Our long-standing foreign policy is dedicated to world peace and security, to the trend of decolonization and self-determination, to

assisting developing and less developed countries and to respect for international law and human rights.

We condemn terrorism in all its forms.

We are in favour of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all United Nations Member States and of the implementation of the provisions of the United Nations Charter, including the democratic principle of fair and balanced representation of all Member States in the various organs and agencies of the United Nations.

I would like to draw the honourable delegates' attention to this last principle. In the Western European Group, a situation is occurring in which very few members — five of them — have by now served during 44 of the 52 years of this Organization's existence. Small and average-sized countries should also have a chance to be present on the Security Council, and I am proud to represent one of those average-sized countries, as I propose my country's candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the Minister of State and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Kingdom of Morocco, His Excellency Mr. Abdellatif Filali.

Mr. Filali (Morocco) (*interpretation from Arabic*): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, convinced as I am that under your leadership and with your vast experience and profound knowledge of international affairs the work of the session will be successful. I would also like to take this opportunity to salute your friendly country of Uruguay.

I would also like to express thanks to Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko for his successful conduct of the work of our previous session. I would like to extend, as well, our deep thanks to Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of our Organization, for the earnest determination and great competence he has brought to bear on the matters entrusted to him.

This fifty-third session of the General Assembly is being held as we bid farewell to the current century and prepare to usher in a new millennium. A large portion of humanity is still facing international conditions that do not come close to enabling them to achieve their ambition and their hope to live in a world where peace, international justice, economic development and life in dignity prevail.

Despite some signs of economic development in certain third world countries, the general trend points to an increasing gap between the advanced world and the developing world. The developing world is facing major changes over which it has no control, including a heavy debt burden, dwindling prices for raw materials, difficulty in gaining access to markets, financial speculation and low foreign investments.

This situation demands that our Organization not merely confine itself to preserving international peace and security in the classical sense, but go beyond that and seek to reduce the economic and social burden of developing countries. This would contribute to the emergence of a new world order based on consensus, consultation and partnership among all countries.

Since its independence, Morocco has firmly believed in the need to base its economic policy on the principle of free enterprise and external openness as a means of achieving the country's economic progress and social development.

Thus Morocco made an effective contribution to the multilateral trade negotiations that resulted in the founding of the World Trade Organization in Marrakech.

Morocco will also participate, with the same degree of resolution, in the forthcoming negotiations with other Member States to ensure that the international community achieves equitable distribution of the dividends of the international trade system, without overlooking the need for proper coordination of monetary, financial and trade policies, lest the financial crisis currently affecting certain international markets have adverse effects on the economies of other countries.

One of the world's primary political trouble spots, indeed one of the most complex problems threatening world peace and security, is the problem of the Middle East. The many resolutions of the United Nations aimed at finding a solution to this problem have failed to enable the Palestinian people to enjoy their inalienable and legitimate rights or to compel Israel to withdraw from the Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem — Al-Quds — and the other occupied territories in the Golan Heights and southern Lebanon. Those resolutions met only with Israeli rejection and defiance.

In this respect, the reneging by the current Israeli Government on the implementation of the agreements signed as part of the peace process following the Madrid

conference and the Oslo meetings dashed the hopes that had been pinned on those agreements and again plunged the region into a spiral of despair and instability.

Israel's reneging is quite obvious in its current procrastination tactics as well as its attempts to impose a policy of fait accompli through the building of further settlements in the occupied territories, in violation of all international norms and laws. Recently, Israel further compounded the situation by implementing, in a provocative way, a policy for the Judaization of Jerusalem — Al-Quds — by changing its cultural and demographic characteristics and surrounding it with settlement colonies. The latest such measure was the announcement by the Israeli Government last June of the expansion of the municipal boundaries of Al-Quds, as part of what is known as "Greater Jerusalem".

The entire Islamic world, as it denounces and condemns these practices, which affect the status of Al-Quds as an integral part of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, considers all these Israeli practices as null and void. This was indeed confirmed by the meeting of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, under the chairmanship of His Majesty King Hassan II, in Casablanca at the end of July.

Morocco believes that this problem can be solved only through respect for the letter and spirit of the agreements signed and through the implementation of the resolutions of international legitimacy, especially the relevant Security Council resolutions, in a way that will guarantee the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of their independent state, with Al-Quds as its capital, and the return of the occupied Arab territories to their legitimate owners.

Despite the tremendous potential and enormous resources available in Africa, and despite the fact that most African countries carry out appropriate economic policies, the African continent is still suffering from serious political, economic and social crises which have led to the marginalization of our continent and the shrinkage of its role in the international arena.

Some of these crises are clearly reflected in worsening unemployment, increased debt burden, falling prices for commodities exported by African countries, inadequate foreign investment and declining foreign assistance, which stands at barely 0.22 per cent of the gross national product of developed countries, despite the fact that the amount agreed upon is 0.7 per cent.

It is indeed regrettable that the deterioration of the economic situation has contributed to a resurgence of political instability and military confrontations in certain African regions, as is the case at present in the Great Lakes region, the Horn of Africa and Western Africa.

While expressing concern about this situation, Morocco supports efforts aimed at containing these crises and at guaranteeing the countries of those regions, especially the Democratic Republic of the Congo, their territorial integrity, stability and security. In this respect, Morocco commends the efforts made by the States members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to find a solution to the crises in Liberia and Sierra Leone. We hope that the efforts being made to overcome the crisis in Guinea-Bissau will soon be successful.

In order to find a solution to African economic problems and their political repercussions, we would like to reaffirm the proposal made by His Majesty King Hassan II during the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) meeting in Marrakesh for adopting an international plan similar to the Marshall Plan, with a view to ensuring African economic revival.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General of our Organization for the important report he prepared on Africa at the request of the Security Council. We hope that the international community will seek to give concrete substance to its recommendations through the settlement of conflicts and the strengthening of security and stability in our continent so as to contribute to the necessary conditions for its economic and social development.

Morocco has consistently affirmed that its membership in the Arab Maghreb Union is a free and strategic option which is irreversible, dictated by its historic and civilizational roots, as well as by its current and future interests. Given the existence of this membership, Morocco cannot but express its deep concern over the continuing suffering of the brotherly Libyan people as a result of the air embargo imposed on them, which caused them a great deal of hardship.

We welcome the approval by the United States and the United Kingdom of the Libyan proposal, which was supported by the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement, to try the two Libyan suspects in a neutral country.

On the other hand, we deeply regret the suffering of another Arab people — the Iraqi people — as a result of the pernicious effects of the economic embargo imposed on that country. We hope that the agreement reached between the Iraqi Government and the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, will lead to a resumption of cooperation between Iraq and the United Nations so that the embargo can be lifted and the hardships of this brotherly people can be ended. We also hope that the Secretary-General will succeed in finding a definitive solution to this protracted crisis.

As a Mediterranean State geographically located near European States, Morocco has been taking a special interest, as always, in efforts to consolidate Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. However, Morocco cannot but be concerned about the continuing status of the Moroccan cities of Ceuta and Melilla and the neighbouring islands, which are still under Spanish occupation, at a time when the page of colonialism in most parts of the world has been turned.

His Majesty King Hassan II proposed some time ago the setting up of a Moroccan-Spanish panel to consider and find a solution to this abnormal situation, in a way that would guarantee Morocco's sovereignty over its territory while taking into account the economic interests of Spain.

Although the Spanish authorities have not yet reacted to this fair proposal, Morocco remains convinced that the depth of its historical and economic ties with neighbouring Spain, coupled with the aspirations of the two peoples to achieve greater rapprochement, cooperation and participation in many fields, will be sufficient to enable the two countries to reach a formula for a definitive solution to this problem.

With regard to developments in the referendum process in our southern provinces — the area known as Western Sahara — we can only point out that it is still experiencing some difficulties. The identification process was stalled from the outset because the other party, without justification, refused to take part in the identification of a large number of candidates. Yet these candidates fulfilled the agreed criteria and had been registered by the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara. Once again we are now faced with the refusal of the other party to participate in the identification of these candidates, who this time presented themselves in accordance with the Houston agreements that the other party had, indeed, also accepted.

Those agreements confirmed the right of candidates to be identified and reasserted the validity of oral testimony. Indeed, in accordance with those agreements, the two parties had agreed to begin, as soon as possible, the identification of any individual who may present himself or herself for that purpose.

We can only express deep concern over these developments, which will delay the referendum operation which has been long awaited by Morocco and the Saharan refugee brothers who have been yearning for more than 20 years to return to their homeland, Morocco, in order to participate in their region's ongoing development. This will probably also have repercussions on the building of the greater Maghreb to which the peoples of the region aspire.

The relentless determination to exclude a number of Saharans from participation in the referendum casts still more doubts on the will of the other party to ensure the necessary conditions for the organization of a fair and transparent referendum.

We hope that the tremendous progress the world is currently witnessing will be a factor leading to the emergence of solidarity among all peoples, solidarity that will contribute to ensuring greater advancement towards development, security, peace and the spread of tranquillity and prosperity among all peoples of the world.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish:* I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, His Excellency Mr. Roberto Robaina González.

Mr. Robaina González (Cuba) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: "To be or not to be."

Never before has Shakespeare's famous dilemma been so valid. Half the world is shuddering with the collapse of the stock exchanges, from Tokyo to Rio, from Moscow to Buenos Aires, from London to Johannesburg, and even right here in New York. We, the other half, are also shuddering, not because of stock exchanges and securities that we do not possess, but because the entire burden of the global financial crash falls mercilessly on us, and nobody, absolutely nobody, is safe.

The long-predicted Armageddon has arrived, and not just in a Hollywood movie. The huge global trap that our increasingly distressed planet has become does not

issue licences for survival to countries or businesses. It does not provide protection from acid rain or the impacts of El Niño, nor does it abide by or believe in ideologies and cultures. It does not offer life jackets to speculators or mega-owners.

As in the times of slavery, human beings have become mere commodities, engrossed in buying and selling each other instead of learning how to enjoy and defend their rights, while poisonous luxuries, the enemies of liberty, corrupt individuals and societies and deprive entire peoples of their national identity.

The inevitable globalization that we should have reached through fraternity, solidarity and cooperation has come upon us in such neoliberalized form that the liberal economic thinking that gave rise to it cannot even be recognized in this new dogma.

The process of globalization and neoliberal internationalization of the world economy has today multiplied the advantages for developed countries to the detriment of the increasingly underdeveloped economies. This makes them more vulnerable to external factors beyond their control, such as the excruciating burden of foreign debt, increasingly unequal rates of exchange, the widening technological gap and the persistent decline in the price of commodities, in the context of a ruthless, speculative and hopelessly inhuman market.

The inequitable trade relationship between rich and poor, more akin to theft or swindle than trade, is a basic element that explains this. According to International Monetary Fund (IMF) data only 0.2 per cent annual growth rate has been seen in non-fuel commodities between 1989 and 1998, while manufactured products grew at a rate of 0.9 per cent. How could economies whose terms of trade deteriorated, during that same period, at an annual rate of 0.4 per cent and whose currencies were severely devaluated be expected to grow?

The excruciating weight of foreign indebtedness — a phenomenon that has become eternal with the increase of inequitable trade — rose from $1.118 trillion in 1989 to $1.875 trillion in 1998, for an annual average increase of 6 per cent. What counts is money and finance, not development or human well-being.

Neoliberal globalization and some of its basic components, such as the liberalization of trade and free competition, do not in themselves mean that there will be an acceleration of economic growth or development in underdeveloped countries. At the same time, unrestrained deregulation and privatization have removed from the agenda the required protection for goods, services and workers in the third world.

Unfair equal treatment is being granted to economies that by their very nature, characteristics and volume are unequal. Tariff barriers are being replaced with more subtle and politically optional methods of protectionism, while a club of selected owners, transnational corporations and Governments negotiate, behind the backs of the vast majority, a multilateral investment agreement that gives the definitive seal of approval to subservience and exclusion.

There is no need for any special telescope to find the famous black holes that swallow stars in outer space. The worst black hole of them all can be found right here on Earth, right before our very eyes, where there was first a gap and then an abyss, where the wealth of the rich grew in step with the poverty of the poor.

International cooperation and official aid for development, funnelled through different organizations of the United Nations system, are tending to decrease, considerably affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of the system's work in the field of development.

Even worse, we see attempts to further condition such aid to political demands that injure national States and undermine the sovereignty of countries and peoples. Furthermore, such attempts erode the authority of Governments by determining their development policies, which directly affects democratic governance. They also bring about the resurgence of diseases that we thought had been eradicated, generating high mortality rates and premature aging of the world population. These are so illegitimate that no one should support them.

We, the victims, cannot be expected think as our victimizers do. As Comrade Fidel Castro said only a few weeks ago at the twelfth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement,

> "it is not possible to acquiesce in a world order which embodies to the utmost the highest principles and purposes of a system that for centuries colonized, enslaved and plundered us all".

Because these nations are so disunited, we have not been able to elude the ravages of neoliberal globalization, which is so alien in spirit to the groundbreaking

Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen and contrary to the very letter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which in a few weeks will be 50 years old. Against all logic, it is in our meetings, committees and other forums that the prerogatives to which we are entitled as human beings are being reduced to mere caricatures in an insane race to alter the very foundations of international law.

We are constantly asked why we so stubbornly call for the genuine democratization of the United Nations and for far-reaching reform of its institutions. What does it take to understand that, when we are on the verge of bidding farewell to the second millennium, the world can no longer be forced to follow Bretton Woods norms, patterns and schemes that are consistent with a world order born out of a war and that are now obsolete.

The Dow Jones average sways and plummets just a few blocks away from this building. Uncertainty and hopelessness are rampant in the markets. Countries are going bankrupt -- and so are their Governments. Hundreds of millions die of famine, disease, violence, terror and war. Some even become living dead, as they are deprived of their national identity. But we are expected to accept that here in the General Assembly those who unleashed this madness are destroying the only truly democratic space where we can act together.

How much longer are we going to allow them to continue imposing conditions, unilaterally launching missiles, improving their nuclear arsenals and testing new "smart weapons", while they demand disarmament from the poor and the illiterate? And further, they are preventing us from doing away with the dictatorship of a Security Council which refuses to expand or to give up or modify the power of veto? There can be no talk of a Security Council that provides legitimacy, let alone security, so long as that body fails to abide by the powers conferred upon it in Article XXIV of the Charter; so long as it ignores the powers of other United Nations bodies; so long as its composition remains inequitable; so long as each and every member does not enjoy identical rights; so long as we in the third world, the overwhelming majority of the world's population, are not duly represented.

For Cuba, the one steadfast and sincere thing to do is to alert the world to which we belong, and to struggle for the values of freedom, justice, dignity and humanitarianism that we believe in and uphold. These are the values that should prevail for the sake of our endangered human species. It is for this end that the resources made available to the United Nations by its Member States should be used.

Enough of politicizing budgets under the pretext of alleged cost-effectiveness -- as if the millions of African children dying of curable diseases, the millions of illiterate people in Latin America, or the millions of people displaced by conflicts in Asia and the Middle East were bolts of cloth, raw materials or spent fuel.

Enough of the appalling facts cited in the latest Human Development Report, issued two weeks ago, which affirms that the barest consumption needs of over a billion people are not being met at all, and that more than 4 billion people lack essential health services and 2 billion suffer from anaemia, including 55 million in industrialized countries.

Enough of accepting that the indicators of human consumption in 70 countries have dropped below the levels of 25 years ago.

Enough of accepting that a child born in a developed country will consume and pollute in his or her lifetime as much as 50 children born in an underdeveloped country.

Enough of accepting that three individuals in this world have amassed fortunes equivalent to the total gross domestic product of 48 States.

Enough of accepting that the most powerful and wealthy nation on Earth, with the highest per capita income, should, according to the report, have the highest rates of human poverty.

Enough of demagogy. Let us make way for ethics, generosity and humanitarianism. Let the debts be paid and the current scale of assessments maintained. Let us put an end to special United Nations peacekeeping operations and to the arms market they have generated, and let us strengthen the actions of the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the many other agencies that have truly endeavoured throughout their existence to assert the rights of every human being. That is the only really fair, responsible and humane thing to do.

In other words, let us not allow so many children to die in the next few hours, days, months and years — such as the 108,217 infants under five years of age, who have died of preventable causes in the underdeveloped world since we opened the fifty-third session last Monday, without the Assembly or the international community of nations being able to do anything about it.

Let us keep the voice and mandate of the peoples and Governments that make up the United Nations from being drowned out by the inhumane interests of the masters and their partners grouped in the "Washington consensus", which is how chaste, scholarly jargon currently defines the alliance of countries and international financial institutions that have dragged us all into disastrous unipolar neoliberalization ruled by a unique and criminal way of thinking which hypocritically boasts of being pluralistic.

Let us prevent heinous and disgusting phenomena such as terrorism from being fostered in that way; both the terrorism that constantly takes innocent lives — which many seek to compare with the fight of other peoples that have employed humanitarian and worthy methods in their resort to weapons in order to win their rights — and the other much more sophisticated, computerized and globalized terrorism that turns the economy, politics and ideas into a lethal weapon to secure the interests of a restricted circle of selfish people who believe it is their prerogative to unilaterally impose their laws and their punishments on others.

We recognize that drafting and implementing international treaties are instrumental in our struggle against terrorism. But if we are truly committed to achieving that goal, then the power to investigate, prevent and punish these acts must be assumed seriously by States as an obligation which may not be delegated. There must be genuine cooperation to apprehend perpetrators, and States must prevent by all means possible terrorist acts against other States being organized, encouraged, funded or tolerated within their territory.

Cuba, which has suffered from terrorism and to which nothing that is human is alien, cannot but unequivocally condemn such actions, methods and practices. Above all, we denounce those responsible for fomenting, supporting, funding, masterminding, propagating or tolerating these loathsome actions, which, as recent events have illustrated, turn their perpetrators into heinous Saturns, capable of devouring their own children.

For almost 40 years our homeland has had to defend itself from aggression and harassment of all kinds: dirty war, mercenary invasions, nuclear threat, veritable hunts organized in attempts to murder our main leaders, pirate attacks, constant acts of sabotage against our industry, our agriculture and our economy, blowing up of airliners in flight — as occurred in Barbados on 6 October 1976; over a thousand hours a week of subversive radio and television transmissions which illegally invade our radio-electronic space; and biological warfare. Our tourist facilities have endured terrorist attacks, employing Central American mercenaries, organized and financed from the United States, with the full awareness and tolerance of the authorities of that country. Furthermore, we are also currently facing further American criminal legislation aimed at intensifying the dirtiest and longest economic war ever perpetrated against any country. This is why we can speak about these issues with absolute morality.

I must say at least a few words about recent accusations by the United States of alleged Cuban espionage activities in Florida, which have been widely disseminated by the mass media as something extraordinary. I am sure the Assembly understands that the most ridiculous and laughable thing to occur in recent days in this nation of scandals is that the world's biggest spy, the United States, has accused of espionage the world's most spied upon country, Cuba.

The reality we live in is not recognized in the current Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Nobody denies that this is a document of universal scope, the outcome of the most progressive thinking of its time and the international culmination of certain trends and values that emerged from the horrors of the Second World War. However, it should not be forgotten that when we embraced it in 1948 almost two thirds of humanity still lived under the colonial and neo-colonial yoke. All those countries had been reduced to mere objects of international law. For them, the most traumatic experience was not the war but underdevelopment, political exclusion and the new and even more catastrophic economic battles imposed upon them.

While we uphold the values of our 50-year-old Declaration, values which cannot be renounced, and reject attempts to cause confusion over it and give it an ideological and political nature, we must have the courage and awareness to recognize its historical and conceptual limitations, which illustrate that the time has come to draft a new international charter of human rights

capable of meeting the requirements of the new millennium.

If we do not do this now, what will be the use of all the efforts made five years ago at the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights to adopt a Declaration and a Programme of Action? What will we tell our peoples? Is it not the duty of democratic Governments to be accountable to their voters for the discharge of their international obligations? Will we finally recognize the right to development as a fundamental, universal and inalienable human right? Will unrelenting reality persuade us that the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights requires the acknowledgment of national and regional characteristics and diverse historical, cultural and religious heritages, as well as the need to strengthen international cooperation concerning this issue objectively and without selectivity?

The establishment of the Office of the High Commissioner and other steps taken in this regard are just fig leaves that fail to conceal all the embarrassing parts.

Many goals have yet to be reached, such as the demand of the Vienna Conference that all States abstain from adopting unilateral measures contrary to international law and the Charter of the United Nations which hinder trade relations and impede the full realization of the rights set forth in the Universal Declaration and its international instruments, particularly the right of all people to living standards adequate for their health and well-being — including nourishment, health care, housing and basic social services.

What will we do to those who violate this mandate? Do we summon them to an international criminal tribunal? Under what charges: contempt for democratic decisions; State terrorism; war Crimes; genocide?

It would seem that the disturbing words of the writer and humanist John Milton are true:

> "They who have put out the people's eyes, reproach them of their blindness."

I say this because the United States Government has ignored all those complaints in the same way as it has drafted lists of presumed violators.

In a blatant challenge to the international community, the advocates of open markets and the end of ideologies have taken additional and distinctly extraterritorial actions aimed at reinforcing their blockade. I ask the interpreters to be accurate: I mean blockade and not embargo. It is an economic, trade and financial blockade against Cuba that ignores six consecutive calls by the Assembly to put an end to what has rightly been fairly described as the grossest, most serious and systematic violation of the human rights of a whole people.

On the contrary, those concerned insist on continuing their failed policy, one of whose instruments was exemplarily dismantled by the international community at the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Human Rights, when it was decided to put an end to the extraordinary procedure on the so-called situation of Cuba and to get rid of the Special Rapporteur. That was a conscious and considered decision, the ultimate assertion of the growing rejection of a politicized resolution that should never have existed in the first place. It was recognition of the truth and a result of the weariness caused by calumny and lies. It was also the way out of a discriminatory, unwarranted and selective exercise targeted on Cuba that consecrated the imperial will to dictate a kind of international law where the powerful and wealthy judge and we, the poor, are doomed to sit on the defendants' bench.

Nevertheless, we have amassed enough evidence to indicate that a new vendetta is under way. The failed attempts last July in the Economic and Social Council to imposed a so-called joint statement on the presumed human rights situation in Cuba, and subsequent initiatives to engage high United Nations authorities or particular countries in the preposterous and unsuccessful task of the late Special Rapporteur, foreshadow new and unwarranted conflicts that will again divert the Organization from its main concerns.

I am referring to documents and guidelines such as these, which I could quote and which will be made available to the press, and which have been forwarded to almost all participants in this room by senior officials of a Government that, in keeping with its imperial philosophy, seems to think that they are entitled to speak but not required to listen humbly and respectfully. I quote from the document:

> "Multilateral efforts suffered a serious setback last April when the United Nations Commission on Human Rights voted against a resolution on Cuba by a margin of 19 to 16, with 18 abstentions."

"Maintaining international focus on the human rights situation in Cuba is a high priority for Secretary of State Albright. She has asked me to speak with you our interest in pursuing a joint statement on Cuba at ECOSOC."

"We feel that the most effective approach would be a joint statement of like-minded countries. The statement could call on the United Nations system to keep the human rights situation in Cuba under review. One mechanism for doing so could be the establishment in Havana of an office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights".

The general thrust is clear.

We take full responsibility in asserting that reconsidering the issue will only mean opening yet another, even more unacceptable chapter in the political manipulation of human rights mechanisms. This would be detrimental to the authority of the body or the relevant office, because our country would not accept the reimposition of any new procedure or discriminatory treatment.

Everything we do in Cuba, whether some like it or not, whether agreed or not, is done for the sake of the human being. We are proud of our reality and, as we have said before, we do not believe it is perfect. We do not want it to be perfect. We do not want to be bored with perfection. We do not take it as an endorsement or export it as a model, and above all we do not impose it on anyone, so no one will attempt to impose their reality on us.

We do not use our agreements or disagreements with others, including our differences with the very harsh, silenced reality of our accusers, to humiliate or condemn anyone. We prefer to discuss them by means of civilized dialogue, which we are at all times prepared to engage in, believing that what really matters is cooperation and not the imposition of a dubious convergence in positions.

Cuba is among the few Members of this Organization that has consistently submitted its reports systematically and in good time to the treaty bodies to which it belongs. Evidence abounds of the transparency and sincerity of our actions and of the strength with which we uphold impartiality and objectivity in the Committees on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee against Torture, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

We have similar credentials in our systematic cooperation with the various mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights and with the Office of the High Commissioner, since its inception. Let me mention also our growing bilateral cooperation in this area with various States in an atmosphere of respect and on an equal footing, each one of us with our respective virtues and flaws.

For these reasons, while we denounce these new intentions and forewarn the Assembly against unwarranted, diversionist and fruitless exercises, we reiterate Cuba's unrestricted willingness and preparedness for dialogue and for multilateral and bilateral cooperation with all States.

No imposed solution can settle a problem. The international community should never allow a cause as noble and compelling as that of human rights to be held hostage to petty political interests.

Cuba is confident that dialogue will prevail over confrontation and recalls, as a token of its goodwill, the invitations it has extended to the thematic rapporteurs on violence against women, on children, on mercenary practices and on other matters, so they can become acquainted with the realities of a socialism that has never needed to proclaim its intrinsic humanity. Unfortunately, however, on occasions when it has broadly disseminated the required information with transparency, that information has at times been manipulated and used to serve the interests and objectives of our aggressors.

So long as Cuban children suffering from leukemia are denied access to Oncaspar and L-Spar to prolong their lives; so long as Cuban AIDS patients are denied access to AZT; so long as urgently needed purchases of respirators for newborn babies in intensive care units are hampered; so long as it is forbidden to sell to Cuba a single pound of metrotrexate to test important medicines against cancer; so long as a 33 per cent drop in the population's daily consumption of calories and a 39 per cent drop in the consumption of proteins is artificially and intentionally provoked by a ban on food exports, by excessive freight costs and prices, and by the harassment of suppliers; so long as attempts are made to starve us to death and to kill us with diseases, while speculation and manipulation is under way with feigned official aid presented as a humanitarian gesture, which we refuse

because we believe it to be insincere; as long as letters such as the one I am holding — I feel compelled to show them, and they will be made available to all — unilaterally justify confusing, contradictory and threatening understandings aimed at globalizing extraterritorial laws, it would be absolutely outrageous, immoral and even shameful to question Cuba's just and sovereign limits, legitimized by the 1948 Universal Declaration itself, that our Government and people are forced to place on those who, wielding human rights in the abstract, defame their homeland, disown their people, foster division and serve the interests of a foreign Power.

I quote from the letter from Mrs. Albright to Senator Jesse Helms:

> "The understanding is an important step forward in our ongoing efforts to encourage greater respect for property rights of United States citizens abroad.
>
> "We expect the full cooperation of the Europeans in carrying out the understanding.
>
> "It is important that we not miss this unique and historic opportunity to advance the goals of the Libertad Act and to establish broad new protections for the property rights of United States citizens in Cuba and throughout the world."

Certainly, this is worthy of note. What Mrs. Albright calls the Libertad Act in her letter is nothing but the regrettably notorious Act that has often been repudiated by the international community: the Helms-Burton Act. I am clarifying this because I know that for most of the members of this Assembly it would be difficult to equate a juridical instrument of this type with a lofty but often misused word such as "freedom".

A self-respecting nation does not allow its dignity and intelligence to be offended. A people that has fought and endured such a barbaric onslaught will never be brought to its knees. A people that exists today because it has learned to overcome its difficulties will never be shattered, let alone convinced of the urgency of any cause besides the revolt of the united.

We the poor are so many and our poverty so great that if we unite, the unity of our poverty will become our greatest asset. This will be our wealth, and we have more than enough poverty to become immensely rich.

Let us set aside our differences. Let us carry on our shoulders the salvation of humanity. Let us gather those who, resourceful and wealthy though they may be, can still feel in their hearts the urgent call for survival in the global era.

Let the world recognize our sincere vote as poor people, and if there is no other choice, let it hear our veto as well. Let us all unite in the struggle. As President Fidel Castro has said, Cuba will never tire of calling for this. Let us unite and globalize our opposition to every boastful act of hegemony.

Let us globalize respect for our human condition, which is the first and foremost right to be claimed. Let us globalize the efforts to save from ecological catastrophe a planet that has been ruined by neoliberalism and consumerism.

Let us globalize ethics, culture and the spirituality of peoples in their immense and wonderful diversity, so that each of us can drink from his own spring and we can pour our clearest waters into the great river of human thought.

Let us globalize, without excluding anyone, science, technology, development and cooperation between nations. Let the rich share their wealth. Let the poor grow, the illiterate learn to read and write, the sick heal. Let the healthy remain healthy and the hungry have food.

Let us globalize generosity and eradicate plundering, selfishness and greed.

Let us globalize respect for the rights of others as a guarantee of peace for all races, ethnicities and religions, so that we may bid farewell to arms.

Let us globalize human freedom as the most sacred trait of our species. Let this be a responsible freedom, with peace and independence, dignity and sovereignty, without humiliation or conditions, without alterations or renunciations — a freedom emerging from the rebellion of human beings against a world that no longer meets their needs and that they are determined to change, as set out in the preamble and article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We do not want these freedoms ever to be politicized; we want them to remain entirely human.

In a few days it will be 40 years since the dawn of Cuba's knowledge of that freedom that re-established the

rights of Cubans and enshrined our humanity, because that freedom was born in our own breasts and nourished by the blood, sweat, efforts and sacrifices of so many generations.

That freedom is still alive today, shielded by an all-enduring unity. It encourages our rebelliousness in the face of a world that deserves to be and can be changed for the sake of all mankind. As the book of *Ecclesiastes* commands:

> "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." *(The Holy Bible, Ecclesiastes 3:1)*

Now is the time and the exact hour that we must act.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: We listened this morning to the statement of the Israeli Prime Minister, and we shall present to you the Palestinian position in the statement of our President next Monday; however, we cannot but reply to what we have heard today with the following brief remarks.

The Prime Minister began his statement with a reference to the role of the League of Nations and the United Nations in the establishment of Israel. But, unfortunately, he never referred to Israel's rejection of the will of the United Nations, including the establishment of an Arab State in Palestine on equal footing, in accordance with the resolution that established Israel. He also failed to refer to the rejection by Israel of all United Nations resolutions adopted since then, its rejection of 24 resolutions on the occupied territories adopted by the Security Council since 1967 and its rejection of hundreds of General Assembly resolutions and the resolutions of other United Nations organs, let alone its violation of the principles of the Charter itself and of international law and international humanitarian law.

The Prime Minister said that peace for him is based upon two principles: security and reciprocity. We believe that there is a great deal of deception in such expressions and the way they are presented. The principle of security, for example, could serve as an excuse for Israel to keep the occupied territories instead of withdrawing from them.

What is more important is that he seems to forget the principles upon which the Middle East peace process has been founded, such as the principle of land for peace and implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), let alone the principles that are recognized by the whole world, such as justice and the right of peoples to self-determination.

The Prime Minister also stated that the Palestinians have jurisdiction over 100 per cent of the Palestinians in Gaza and 90 per cent in the West Bank. This is a preposterous claim. In addition to its falsity, it ignores the fact that 100 per cent of our Palestinian people on our land still live under the mercy of occupation and are subjected to Israeli oppression, in many cases not even be able to move from one village to another.

The Prime Minister spoke about the Palestinian statements without even looking at what is said by the Israeli officials, while he himself uses expressions such as Judea and Samaria to describe our occupied Palestinian territory — to describe the West Bank. He talked about the Palestinian covenant, ignoring the decision by the Palestinian National Council in April 1996 to abrogate the articles that contradict the exchange of letters of recognition, a decision which was met by the official welcome of the American Government, as well as the Israeli Government itself at that time.

The Prime Minister talked about Israel's transferring money to the Palestinians. He ignored the fact that it is our money and our right and that it is frequently subject to cuts, sometimes even withheld. He forgets that this procedure is the outcome of the Israeli rejection of the implementation of what has been agreed upon with regard to the construction of the airport and seaport. And he also ignores the continued destructive process that Israel carries out against the Palestinian economy.

He also spoke about the deadlines mentioned in the agreements, stating that these are not sacred. And he recalled unilateral acts by the Palestinian leadership. I would like to clarify here that the agreement on that transitional period expires on 4 May 1999 and that any decision taken by the Palestinian leadership, according to its responsibilities at the time, regardless of the nature of

such decisions, cannot be considered a unilateral act. I wish to add here that the primary responsibility for the inability of the parties to reach any final settlement within the agreed deadlines falls upon the Government of Mr. Netanyahu.

What the Prime Minister was really saying in the previous points mentioned, and in other statements, such as on his vision of the final settlement, is that he seeks to have the Palestinians live within isolated areas under limited self-rule, meaning in bantustans akin to the abhorrent apartheid style. He also says that he does not recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and that he does not want to implement Security Council resolution 242 (1967). This is not only a violation of the agreements reached, it is also a destruction of these agreements and of their essence, namely, the mutual recognition between the two parties. That is precisely the real cause of what ails the peace process at the present time.

Lastly, it seems that everything that has been said is based upon a certain understanding that the land is an Israeli land and that the Palestinians are a minority within Israel, in need of some kind of solution. Maybe even Israel is in need of some solution with regard to them.

Mr. Prime Minister, you are completely wrong. The land is ours. But we have accepted international legitimacy in this regard, despite the injustice that befell us. The Palestinians are an old, proud people who have the right to sovereignty in their own state. We will remain committed to the peace process, but on the basis of the mutual recognition of the legitimate rights of both parties and on the basis that the implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) is the aim of the process.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The representative of Iraq has asked for the floor. He has the floor.

Mr. Al-Hitti (Iraq) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I would like to take the floor to exercise my right of reply against the Israeli Prime Minister.

This morning the General Assembly listened to a series of lies from a man who, by all international standards, despises all international considerations and who presides over a Government which does the same. The gross falsification of history in the Israeli Prime Minister's statement is a negation of the memory of the international community, which is perfectly aware that that man was educated and formed within the major terrorist gangs in the world.

The Israeli Prime Minister accused my country of having ceased cooperation with the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM), deliberately ignoring the fact that Iraq took this step after having implemented all its obligations under the terms of Security Council resolution 687 (1991) during the past eight years.

The Israeli Prime Minister is the last one to speak about the implementation of Security Council resolutions, considering the history of his country and the poor reputation it has acquired and the frivolity it has shown with respect to international resolutions. Specifically, Israel did not even implement paragraph 14 of resolution 687 (1991) to which Mr. Netanyahu referred, calling for consideration of a Middle East free from all weapons of mass destruction, foremost among which is the Israeli arsenal, whether they be nuclear, chemical or biological.

The world knows that Israel has more than 200 nuclear weapon heads and a large arsenal of other weapons of mass destruction. It has even refused to join the system of international guarantees of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This is not to mention the refusal to sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Moreover, Israel was the first to use prohibited weapons during its repeated acts of aggression against Arab countries — multiple-head bombs, napalm bombs — which were utilized on a grand scale against Lebanon, Palestine and other Arab countries. Israel also demonstrated its disregard of international law to an unparalleled degree when its forces attacked the United Nations centre in the city of Qana in Lebanon when it was full of innocent Lebanese civilians who had fled the hell of Israeli planes committing an act of aggression against Lebanon.

Mr. Baudin (Senegal), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I will now give the floor to the representative of Turkey in exercise of his right of reply.

Mr. Vural (Turkey): The hour is late, Mr. President. It is with a sense of deep regret that I take the floor to exercise my right of reply to the statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece, Mr. Pangalos. But the record must be set straight. Distortions must not be allowed to circulate freely.

It is evident that when it comes to Turkish-Greek relations, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece has a very selective memory. He chooses to ignore some very vital facts: his country's design to turn the Aegean Sea into a Greek lake is not mentioned. Their highly restricted acceptance of the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice is ignored. But I have no intention of elaborating on this long list.

Let me once again remind this Assembly that only a few hours ago our Prime Minister, Mr. Yilmaz, from this very rostrum called for a dialogue between the two countries to resolve our outstanding problems. I sincerely urge the distinguished Minister to rise to this occasion.

Mr. President, amnesia may be a Greek word, but it cannot be a license for serious omissions.

As to the issue of Cyprus, the Foreign Minister of Greece mentions 1974 as if it were the beginning of the problem. He conveniently omits the tragic events of the 1960s, but there are those who have not forgotten. The Turkish Cypriot people remember vividly the ethnic cleansing inflicted upon them by the Greek Cypriots. They also remember being forcibly denied their constitutional rights.

As to the year 1974, let me quote the words of the late Archbishop Makarios when he addressed the Security Council on 19 July 1974.

> "The coup of the Greek junta is an invasion, and from its consequences the whole people of Cyprus suffers, both Greeks and Turks." (*S/PV.1780, p. 21*)

I have nothing to add to this statement. The state of the island at this moment is explained by these very words. Unfortunately, this mentality is still the main obstacle to achieving a reconciliation between the two co-owners of the island.

If Mr. Pangalos blames us for not allowing the tragedy of Bosnia or Rwanda to occur in Cyprus, he is absolutely right. To set the record straight, Turkey intervened in 1974 in exercise of its treaty rights as a guarantor Power. Turkey remains committed to protecting the Turkish Cypriot people from the fate of those who suffer tragically from ethnic and religious hatred and "cleansing" efforts.

Mr. Danesh-Yazdi (Islamic Republic of Iran): In one of the statements made this morning, reference was made to the military capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this connection, my delegation wishes to reiterate the position commonly shared by all States in the Middle East that the sole threat — the sole threat — to the security and stability of the Middle East stems from Israel's nuclear capabilities and access to advanced missile technology. This position does not reflect a mere critical notion; rather, it asserts deep and serious concern based on facts and realities. Israel's attempt to level allegations is but a futile cover for the danger it poses to the entire region.

It is also a matter of fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran is a victim of weapons of mass destruction and a principal proponent of the Middle East as a zone free from weapons of mass destruction. This position was well elaborated by President Khatami in this very building just three days ago when he said:

> "The establishment of zones free from weapons of mass destruction, particularly in the Middle East, constitutes an appropriate first step in alleviating tension and mistrust emanating from these weapons. We in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as victims of the use of weapons of mass destruction, are more cognizant than anyone else of their horrifying impact. We shall thus stay at the forefront of international efforts to establish and strengthen universal arrangements for their destruction." (*A/53/PV.8*)

Of course, Iran, like others in the region, cannot remain idle against the Israeli threat and menace to the region. Iran is determined to defend with all its capabilities its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity against outside threat and danger.

Mr. Arias (Spain) (*interpretation from Spanish*): My delegation wishes to address references to the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla and to other parts of Spanish territory, made this afternoon to the General Assembly in the statement of the Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Kingdom of Morocco.

Such references are not in keeping with reality, since they bear on integral parts of the territory of Spain whose citizens are represented in the Spanish Parliament and enjoy the very same status and privileges as their compatriots. Moreover, those references are not consonant with the good relations that prevail between the Kingdoms of Spain and Morocco.

The meeting rose at 8 p.m.